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BY

WILKIE COLLINS

IN THREE VOLUMES

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PART II.—*continued.*

CHAPTER VII.

On further inquiry, it turned out that 'the gentleman from Munich' had no time to spare. In the absence of Mr. Keller, he had asked if he could see 'one of the other partners.' This seemed to imply that commercial interests were in some way connected with the stranger's visit—in which case, Mrs. Wagner was perfectly competent to hear what he had to say.

'Where is the gentleman?' she asked.

'In the drawing-room,' Joseph answered.

Mrs. Wagner at once left the office. She found herself in the presence of a dignified elderly gentleman, dressed entirely in black,

and having the ribbon of some order of merit attached to the button-hole of his long frock-coat. His eyes opened wide in surprise, behind his gold spectacles, when he found himself face to face with a lady. 'I fear there is some mistake,' he said, in the smoothest of voices, and with the politest of bows; 'I asked to see one of the partners.'

Mrs. Wagner added largely to his amazement, by informing him of the position that she held in the firm. 'If you come on a matter of business,' she proceeded, 'you may trust me to understand you, sir, though I am only a woman. If your visit relates to private affairs, I beg to suggest that you should write to Mr. Keller—I will take care that he receives your letter the moment he returns.'

'There is not the least necessity for my

troubling you,' the stranger replied. 'I am a physician; and I have been summoned to Frankfort to consult with my colleagues here, on a serious case of illness. Mr. Keller's sister is one of my patients in Munich. I thought I would take the present opportunity of speaking to him about the state of her health.'

He had just introduced himself in those words, when Mr. Keller entered the room. The merchant and the physician shook hands like old friends.

'No alarming news of my sister, I hope?' said Mr. Keller.

'Only the old trouble, my good friend. Another attack of asthma.'

Mrs. Wagner rose to leave the room. Mr. Keller stopped her. 'There is not the

least necessity for you to leave us,' he said. 'Unless my presentiments deceive me, we may even have occasion to ask your advice. —Is there any hope, doctor, of her being well enough to leave Munich, towards the end of the month?'

'I am sorry to say it,' answered the physician—'having heard of the interesting occasion on which she had engaged to be one of your guests—but, at her age, I must ask for a little more time.'

'In other words, it is impossible for my sister to be with us, on the day of my son's marriage?'

'Quite impossible. She has so few pleasures, poor soul, and she is so bitterly disappointed, that I volunteered to take advantage of my professional errand here, to make a

very bold request. Let me first do your excellent sister justice. She will not hear of the young people being disappointed by any postponement of the wedding, on her account. And here is the famous necklace, committed to my care, to prove that she is sincere.'

He took his little travelling-bag from the chair on which he had placed it, and produced the case containing the necklace. No woman—not even a head-partner in a great house of business—could have looked at those pearls, and preserved her composure. Mrs. Wagner burst out with a cry of admiration.

Mr. Keller passed the necklace over without notice; his sister was the one object of interest to him. 'Would she be fit to travel,' he asked, 'if we put off the marriage for a month?'

'She shall be fit to travel, barring accidents,' said the physician, 'if you can put off the marriage for a fortnight. I start this evening on my return to Munich, and not a day shall pass without my seeing her.'

Mr. Keller appealed to Mrs. Wagner. 'Surely, we might make this trifling sacrifice?' he said. 'The pleasure of seeing her nephew married is likely to be the last pleasure of my sister's life.'

'In your place,' said Mrs. Wagner, 'I should not hesitate for an instant to grant the fortnight's delay. But the bride and bridegroom must be consulted, of course.'

'And the bride's parents,' suggested the discreet physician, 'if they are still living.'

'There is only her mother living,' said Mr. Keller. 'She is too high-minded a

person to raise any objection, I am sure.' He paused, and reflected for awhile. 'Fritz counts for nothing,' he went on. 'I think we ought to put the question, in the first instance, to the bride?' He rang the bell, and then took the necklace out of Mrs. Wagner's hands. 'I have a very high opinion of little Minna,' he resumed. 'We will see what the child's own kind heart says —undisturbed by the influence of the pearls, and without any prompting on the part of her mother.'

He closed the jewel case, and put it into a cabinet that stood near him. Joseph was sent upstairs, with the necessary message. 'Don't make any mistake,' said his master; 'I wish to see Miss Minna, alone.'

The physician took a pinch of snuff while

they were waiting. 'The test is hardly conclusive,' he remarked slily; 'women are always capable of sacrificing themselves. What will the bridegroom say?'

'My good sir,' Mr. Keller rejoined a little impatiently, 'I have mentioned already that Fritz counts for nothing.'

Minna came in. Her colour rose when she found herself unexpectedly in the presence of a dignified and decorated stranger. The physician tapped his snuff-box, with the air of a man who thoroughly understood young women. 'Charming indeed!' he said confidentially to Mrs. Wagner; 'I am young enough (at heart, madam) to wish I was Fritz.'

Mr. Keller advanced to meet Minna, and took her hand.

'My dear,' he said, 'what would you think of me, if I requested you to put off your marriage for two whole weeks—and all on account of an old woman?'

'I should think you had surely some reason, sir, for asking me to do that,' Minna replied; 'and I confess I should be curious to know who the old woman was.'

In the fewest and plainest words, Mr. Keller repeated what the physician had told him. 'Take your own time to think of it,' he added; 'and consult your mother first, if you like.'

Minna's sweet face looked lovelier than ever, glowing with the heavenly light of true and generous feeling. 'Oh, Mr. Keller!' she exclaimed, 'do you really suppose I am cold-hearted enough to want time to think

of it? I am sure I may speak for my mother, as well as for myself. Fräulein Keller's time shall be our time. Please tell her so, with my duty—or, may I be bold enough to say already, with my love?'

Mr. Keller kissed her forehead with a fervour of feeling that was rare with him. 'You are well worthy of my sister's bridal gift,' he said—and took the necklace out of the cabinet, and gave it to her.

For some moments Minna stood looking at the magnificent pearls, in a state of speechless enchantment. When she did speak, her first delightful ardour of admiration had cooled under the chilling perception of a want of proper harmony between her pearls and herself. 'They are too grand for me,' she said sadly; 'I ought to be a great

lady, with a wardrobe full of magnificent dresses, to wear such pearls as these!' She looked at them again, with the natural longing of her sex and age. 'May I take the necklace upstairs,' she asked, with the most charming inconsistency, 'and see how it looks when I put it on?'

Mr. Keller smiled and waved his hand. 'You can do what you like with your own necklace, my dear,' he said. 'When I have written a line to my sister, perhaps I may follow you, and admire my daughter-in-law in all her grandeur.'

The physician looked at his watch. 'If you can write your letter in five minutes,' he suggested, 'I can take it with me to Munich.'

Mrs. Wagner and Minna left the room

together. 'Come and see how it looks,' said Minna; 'I should so like to have your opinion.'

'I will follow you directly, my dear. There is something I have forgotten in the office.'

The events of the day had ended in making Jack drowsy; he was half-asleep on the window-seat. Mrs. Wagner effectually roused him.

'Mr. Keeper of the Keys,' she said; 'I want my desk opened.'

Jack was on his legs in an instant. 'Ha, Mistress, it's jolly to hear you say that—it's like being in London again.'

The desk was of the spacious commercial sort, with a heavy mahogany lid. Everything inside was in the most perfect order.

A row of 'pigeon-holes' at the back had their contents specified by printed tickets. 'Abstracts of correspondence, A to Z;' 'Terms for commission agency;' 'Key of the iron safe.' 'Key of the private ledger' —and so on. The ledger—a stout volume with a brass lock, like a private diary—was placed near the pigeon-holes. On the top of it rested a smaller book, of the pocket-size, entitled 'Private Accounts.' Mrs. Wagner laid both books open before her, at the pages containing the most recent entries, and compared them. 'I felt sure I had forgotten it!' she said to herself—and transferred an entry in the ledger to the private account-book. After replacing the ledger, she locked the desk, and returned the key to Jack.

'Remember,' she said, 'the rule in London is the rule here. My desk is never to be opened, except when I ask you to do it. And if you allow the key to pass out of your own possession, you cease to be Keeper.'

'Did I ever do either of those two things in London?' Jack asked.

'Never.'

'Then don't be afraid of my doing them here. I say! you haven't put back the little book.' He produced the key again, and put it into the lock—while Mrs. Wagner was occupied in placing her account-book in her pocket.

'Its proper place is not in the desk,' she explained; 'I usually keep it about me.'

Jack's ready suspicion was excited. 'Ah,' he cried, with an outburst of indignation, 'you won't trust it to me!'

'Take care I don't set a bad-conduct mark against you!' said Mrs. Wagner. 'You foolish fellow, the little book is a copy of what is in the big book—and I trust you with the big book.'

She knew Jack thoroughly well. His irritable dignity was at once appeased when he heard that the biggest of the duplicate books was in his keeping. He took the key out of the lock again. At the same moment, Mr. Keller entered the office. Jack possessed the dog's enviable faculty of distinguishing correctly between the people who are, and the people who are not, their

true friends. Mr. Keller privately disliked the idea of having a person about him who had come out of a madhouse. Jack's instincts warned him to leave a room when Mr. Keller entered it. He left the office now.

'Is it possible that you trust that crazy creature with the key of your desk?' said Mr. Keller. 'Even your bitterest enemy, Mrs. Wagner, would not believe you could be guilty of such an act of rashness.'

'Pardon me, sir, it is you who are guilty of an act of rashness in forming your judgment. "Fancy a woman in her senses trusting her keys to a man who was once in Bedlam!" Everybody said that of me, when I put Jack to the proof in my own house.'

'Aha! there are other people then who agree with me?' said Mr. Keller.

'There are other people, sir (I say it with all needful respect), who know no more of the subject than you do. The most certain curative influence that can be exercised over the poor martyrs of the madhouse, is to appeal to their self-respect. From first to last, Jack has never been unworthy of the trust that I have placed in him. Do you think my friends owned they had been mistaken? No more than you will own it! Make your mind easy. I will be personally answerable for anything that is lost, while I am rash enough to trust my crazy creature with my key.'

Mr. Keller's opinion was not in the least

shaken; he merely checked any further expression of it, in deference to an angry lady. 'I dare say you know best,' he remarked politely. 'Let me mention the little matter that has brought me here. David Glenney is, no doubt, closely occupied in London. He ought to know at once that the wedding-day is deferred. Will you write to him, or shall I?'

Mrs. Wagner began to recover her temper.

'I will write with pleasure, Mr. Keller. We have half an hour yet before post-time. I have promised Minna to see how the wonderful necklace looks on her. Will you excuse me for a few minutes? Or will you go upstairs with me?—I think you said something about it in the drawing-room.'

'Certainly,' said Mr. Keller, 'if the ladies will let me in.'

They ascended the stairs together. On the landing outside the drawing-room, they encountered Fritz and Minna—one out of temper, and the other in tears.

'What's wrong now?' Mr. Keller asked sharply. 'Fritz! what does that sulky face mean?'

'I consider myself very badly used,' Fritz answered. 'I say there's a great want of proper consideration for Me, in putting off our marriage. And Madame Fontaine agrees with me.'

'Madame Fontaine?' He looked at Minna, as he repeated the name. 'Is this really true?'

Minna trembled at the bare recollection

of what had passed. 'Oh, don't ask me!' she pleaded piteously; 'I can't tell what has come to my mother—she is so changed, she frightens me. And as for Fritz,' she said, rousing herself, 'if he is to be a selfish tyrant, I can tell him this—I won't marry him at all!'

Mr. Keller turned to Fritz, and pointed contemptuously down the stairs.

'Leave us!' he said. Fritz opened his lips to protest. Mr. Keller interposed, with a protest of his own. 'One of these days,' he went on, 'you may possibly have a son. You will not find his society agreeable to you, when he happens to have made a fool of himself.' He pointed down the stairs for the second time. Fritz retired, frowning portentously. His father addressed Minna

with marked gentleness of manner. 'Rest and recover yourself, my child. I will see your mother, and set things right.'

'Don't go away by yourself, my dear,' Mrs. Wagner added kindly; 'come with me to my room.'

Mr. Keller entered the drawing-room, and sent Joseph with another message. 'Go up to Madame Fontaine, and say I wish to see her here immediately.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE widow presented herself, with a dogged resignation singularly unlike her customary manner. Her eyes had a set look of hardness; her lips were fast closed; her usually colourless complexion had faded to a strange greyish pallor. If her dead husband could have risen from the grave, and warned Mr. Keller, he would have said, 'Once or twice in my life, I have seen her like that—mind what you are about!'

She puzzled Mr. Keller. He tried to gain time—he bowed and pointed to a

chair. Madame Fontaine took the chair in silence. Her hard eyes looked straight at the master of the house, overhung more heavily than usual by their drooping lids. Her thin lips never opened. The whole expression of the woman said plainly, 'You speak first!'

Mr. Keller spoke. His kindly instinct warned him not to refer to Minna, in alluding to the persons from whom he had derived his information. 'I hear from my son,' he said, 'that you do not approve of our putting off the wedding-day, though it is only for a fortnight. Are you aware of the circumstances?'

'I am aware of the circumstances.'

'Your daughter informed you of my sister's illness, I suppose?'

At that first reference to Minna, some inner agitation faintly stirred the still surface of Madame Fontaine's face.

'Yes,' she said. 'My thoughtless daughter informed me.'

The epithet applied to Minna, aggravated by the deliberate emphasis laid on it, jarred on Mr. Keller's sense of justice. 'It appears to me,' he said, 'that your daughter acted in this matter, not only with the truest kindness, but with the utmost good sense. Mrs. Wagner and my sister's physician were both present at the time, and both agreed with me in admiring her conduct. What has she done to deserve that you should call her thoughtless?'

'She ought to have remembered her duty to her mother. She ought to have

consulted me, before she presumed to decide for herself.'

'In that case, Madame Fontaine, would you have objected to change the day of the marriage?'

'I am well aware, sir, that your sister has honoured my daughter by making her a magnificent present——'

Mr. Keller's face began to harden. 'May I beg you to be so good as to answer my question plainly?' he said, in tones which were peremptory for the first time. 'Would you have objected to grant the fortnight's delay?'

She answered him, on the bare chance that a strong expression of her opinion, as the bride's mother, might, even now, induce him to revert to the date originally chosen

for the wedding. 'I should certainly have objected,' she said firmly.

'What difference could it possibly make to *you?*' There was suspicion in his manner, as well as surprise, when he put that question. 'For what reason would you have objected?'

'Is my objection, as Minna's mother, not worthy of some consideration, sir, without any needless inquiry into motives?'

'Your daughter's objection—as the bride—would have been a final objection, to my mind,' Mr. Keller answered. 'But *your* objection is simply unaccountable; and I press you for your motives, having this good reason for doing so on my side. If I am to disappoint my sister—cruelly to disap-

point her—it must be for some better cause than a mere caprice.'

It was strongly put, and not easily answered. Madame Fontaine made a last effort—she invented the likeliest motives she could think of. 'I object, sir, in the first place, to putting off the most important event in my daughter's life, and in my life, as if it was some trifling engagement. Besides, how do I know that some other unlucky circumstance may not cause more delays; and perhaps prevent the marriage from taking place at all?'

Mr. Keller rose from his chair. Whatever her true motives might be, it was now perfectly plain that she was concealing them from him. 'If you have any more serious

reasons to give me than these,' he said quietly and coldly, 'let me hear them between this and post-time to-morrow. In the meanwhile, I need not detain you any longer.'

Madame Fontaine rose also—but she was not quite defeated yet.

'As things are, then,' she resumed, 'I am to understand, sir, that the marriage is put off to the thirteenth of January next?'

'Yes, with your daughter's consent.'

'Suppose my daughter changes her mind, in the interval?'

'Under your influence?'

'Mr. Keller! you insult me.'

'I should insult your daughter, Madame Fontaine—after what she said in this room

before me and before other witnesses—if I supposed her to be capable of changing her mind, except under your influence.'

'Good evening, sir.'

'Good evening, madam.'

She went back to her room.

The vacant spaces on the walls were prettily filled up with prints and water-colour drawings. Among these last was a little portrait of Mr. Keller, in a glazed frame. She approached it—looked at it—and, suddenly tearing it from the wall, threw it on the floor. It happened to fall with the glass uppermost. She stamped on it, in a perfect frenzy of rage; not only crushing the glass, but even breaking the frame, and completely destroying the portrait as a work of art. 'There! that has done me good,'

she said to herself—and kicked the fragments into a corner of the room.

She was now able to take a chair at the fireside, and shape out for herself the course which it was safest to follow.

Minna was first in her thoughts. She could bend the girl to her will, and send her to Mr. Keller. But he would certainly ask, under what influence she was acting, in terms which would place the alternative between a downright falsehood, or a truthful answer. Minna was truth itself; in her youngest days, she had been one of those rare children who never take their easy refuge in a lie. What influence would be most likely to persuade her to deceive Fritz's father? The widow gave up the idea, in the moment when it occurred to her.

Once again, 'Jezebel's Daughter' unconsciously touched Jezebel's heart with the light of her purity and her goodness. The mother shrank from deliberately degrading the nature of her own child.

The horrid question of the money followed. On the thirty-first of the month, the promissory note would be presented for payment. Where was the money to be found?

Some little time since, having the prospect of Minna's marriage on the thirtieth of December before her, she had boldly resolved on referring the holder of the note to Mr. Keller. Did it matter to her what the sordid old merchant said or thought, after Minna had become his son's wife? She

would coolly say to him, 'The general body of the creditors harassed me. I preferred having one creditor to deal with, who had no objection to grant me time. *His* debt has fallen due; and I have no money to pay it. Choose between paying it yourself, and the disgrace of letting your son's mother-in-law be publicly arrested in Frankfort for debt.'

So she might have spoken, if her daughter had been a member of Mr. Keller's family. With floods of tears, with eloquent protestations, with threats even of self-destruction, could she venture on making the confession now?

She remembered how solemnly she had assured Mr. Keller that her debts were really and truly paid. She remembered the in-

human scorn with which he had spoken of persons who failed to meet their pecuniary engagements honestly. Even if he forgave her for deceiving him—which was in the last degree improbable—he was the sort of man who would suspect her of other deceptions. He would inquire if she had been quite disinterested in attending at his bedside, and saving his life. He might take counsel privately with his only surviving partner, Mrs. Wagner. Mrs. Wagner might recall the interview in the drawing-room, and the conversation about Jack; and might see her way to consulting Jack's recollections of his illness at Würzburg. The risk to herself of encountering these dangers was trifling. But the risk to Minna involved nothing less than the breaking off of the marriage. She de-

cided on keeping up appearances, at any sacrifice, until the marriage released her from the necessities of disguise.

So it came back again to the question of how the money was to be found.

Had she any reasonable hope of success, if she asked for a few days' leave of absence, and went to Würzburg? Would the holder of the bill allow her to renew it for a fortnight?

She got up, and consulted her glass—and turned away from it again, with a sigh. 'If I was only ten years younger!' she thought.

The letter which she received from Würzburg had informed her that the present holder of the bill was 'a middle-aged man.' If he had been very young, or very old, she

would have trusted in the autumn of her beauty, backed by her ready wit. But experience had taught her that the fascinations of a middle-aged woman are, in the vast majority of cases, fascinations thrown away on a middle-aged man. Even if she could hope to be one of the exceptions that prove the rule, the middle-aged man was an especially inaccessible person, in this case. He had lost money by her already—money either paid, or owing, to the spy whom he had set to watch her. Was this the sort of man who would postpone the payment of his just dues?

She opened one of the drawers in the toilette table, and took out the pearl necklace. 'I thought it would come to this,' she said quietly. Instead of paying the promis-

sory note, Mr. Keller will have to take the necklace out of pledge.'

The early evening darkness of winter had set in. She dressed herself for going out, and left her room, with the necklace in its case, concealed under her shawl.

Poor puzzled Minna was waiting timidly to speak to her in the corridor. 'Oh mamma, do forgive me! I meant it for the best.'

The widow put one arm (the other was not at liberty) round her daughter's waist. 'You foolish child,' she said, 'will you never understand that your poor mother is getting old and irritable? I may think you have made a great mistake, in sacrificing yourself to the infirmities of an asthmatic stranger at Munich; but as to

being ever really angry with you——! Kiss me, my love; I never was fonder of you than I am now. Lift my veil. Oh, my darling, I don't like giving you to anybody, even to Fritz.'

Minna changed the subject—a sure sign that she and Fritz were friends again. 'How thick and heavy your veil is!' she said.

'It is cold out of doors, my child, to-night.'

'But why are you going out?'

'I don't feel very well, Minna. A brisk walk in the frosty air will do me good.'

'Mamma, do let me go with you!'

'No, my dear. You are not a hard old woman like me—and you shall not run the risk of catching cold. Go into my room,

and keep the fire up. I shall be back in half an hour.'

'Where is my necklace, mamma?'

'My dear, the bride's mother keeps the bride's necklace—and, when we do try it on, we will see how it looks by daylight.'

In a minute more, Madame Fontaine was out in the street, on her way to the nearest jeweller.

CHAPTER IX.

THE widow stopped at a jeweller's window in the famous street called the Zeil. The only person in the shop was a simple-looking old man, sitting behind the counter, reading a newspaper.

She went in. 'I have something to show you, sir,' she said, in her softest and sweetest tones. The simple old man first looked at her thick veil, and then at the necklace. He lifted his hands in amazement and admiration. 'May I examine these glorious pearls?' he asked—and looked at

them through a magnifying-glass, and weighed them in his hand. 'I wonder you are not afraid to walk out alone in the dark, with such a necklace as this,' he said. 'May I send to my foreman, and let him see it?'

Madame Fontaine granted his request. He rang the bell which communicated with the work-rooms. Being now satisfied that she was speaking to the proprietor of the shop, she risked her first inquiry.

'Have you any necklace of imitation pearls which resembles my necklace?' she asked.

The old gentleman started, and looked harder than ever at the impenetrable veil. 'Good heavens—no!' he exclaimed. 'There is no such thing in all Frankfort.'

'Could an imitation be made, sir?'

The foreman entered the shop—a sullen, self-concentrated man. 'Fit for a queen,' he remarked, with calm appreciation of the splendid pearls. His master repeated to him Madame Fontaine's last question. 'They might do it in Paris,' he answered briefly. 'What time could you give them, madam?'

'I should want the imitation sent here before the thirteenth of next month.'

The master, humanely pitying the lady's ignorance, smiled and said nothing. The foreman's decision was rough and ready. 'Nothing like time enough; quite out of the question.'

Madame Fontaine had no choice but to resign herself to circumstances. She had entered the shop with the idea of exhibiting

the false necklace on the wedding-day, whilst the genuine pearls were pledged for the money of which she stood in need. With the necklace in pawn, and with no substitute to present in its place, what would Minna say, what would Mr. Keller think? It was useless to pursue those questions—some plausible excuse must be found. No matter what suspicions might be excited, the marriage would still take place. The necklace was no essential part of the ceremony which made Fritz and Minna man and wife —and the money must be had.

'I suppose, sir, you grant loans on valuable security—such as this necklace?' she said.

'Certainly, madam.'

'Provided you have the lady's name and

address,' the disagreeable foreman suggested, turning to his master.

The old man cordially agreed. 'Quite true! quite true! And a reference besides—some substantial person, madam, well known in this city. The responsibility is serious with such pearls as these.'

'Is the reference absolutely necessary?' Madame Fontaine asked.

The foreman privately touched his master behind the counter. Understanding the signal, the simple old gentleman closed the jewel-case, and handed it back. 'Absolutely necessary,' he answered.

Madame Fontaine went out again into the street. 'A substantial reference' meant a person of some wealth and position in Frankfort—a person like Mr. Keller, for

example. Where was she to find such a reference? Her relatives in the city had deliberately turned their backs on her. Out of Mr. Keller's house, they were literally the only 'substantial' people whom she knew. The one chance left seemed to be to try a pawnbroker.

At this second attempt, she was encountered by a smart young man. The moment *he* saw the necklace, he uttered a devout ejaculation of surprise and blew a whistle. The pawnbroker himself appeared—looked at the pearls—looked at the veiled lady—and answered as the jeweller had answered, but less civilly. 'I'm not going to get myself into a scrape,' said the pawnbroker; 'I must have a good reference.'

Madame Fontaine was not a woman

easily discouraged. She turned her steps towards the noble mediæval street called the Judengasse—then thickly inhabited; now a spectacle of decrepid architectural old age, to be soon succeeded by a new street.

By twos and threes at a time, the Jews in this quaint quarter of the town clamorously offered their services to the lady who had come among them. When the individual Israelite to whom she applied saw the pearls, he appeared to take leave of his senses. He screamed; he clapped his hands; he called upon his wife, his children, his sisters, his lodgers, to come and feast their eyes on such a necklace as had never been seen since Solomon received the Queen of Sheba.

The first excitement having worn itself

out, a perfect volley of questions followed. What was the lady's name? Where did she live? How had she got the necklace? Had it been given to her? and, if so, who had given it? Where had it been made? Why had she brought it to the Judengasse? Did she want to sell it? or to borrow money on it? Aha! To borrow money on it. Very good, very good indeed; but—and then the detestable invitation to produce the reference made itself heard once more.

Madame Fontaine's answer was well conceived. 'I will pay you good interest, in place of a reference,' she said. Upon this, the Jewish excitability, vibrating between the desire of gain and the terror of consequences, assumed a new form. Some of them groaned; some of them twisted their

fingers frantically in their hair; some of them called on the Deity worshipped by their fathers to bear witness how they had suffered, by dispensing with references in other cases of precious deposits; one supremely aged and dirty Jew actually suggested placing an embargo on the lady and her necklace, and sending information to the city authorities at the Town Hall. In the case of a timid woman, this sage's advice might actually have been followed. Madame Fontaine preserved her presence of mind, and left the Judengasse as freely as she had entered it. 'I can borrow the money elsewhere,' she said haughtily at parting. 'Yes,' cried a chorus of voices, answering, 'you can borrow of a receiver of stolen goods.'

It was only too true! The extraordinary

value of the pearls demanded, on that account, extraordinary precautions on the part of money-lenders of every degree. Madame Fontaine put back the necklace in the drawer of her toilette-table. The very splendour of Minna's bridal gift made it useless as a means of privately raising money among strangers.

And yet, the money must be found—at any risk, under any circumstances, no matter how degrading or how dangerous they might be.

With that desperate resolution, she went to her bed. Hour after hour she heard the clock strike. The faint cold light of the new day found her still waking and thinking, and still unprepared with a safe plan for meeting the demand on her, when the note

became due. As to resources of her own, the value of the few jewels and dresses that she possessed did not represent half the amount of her debt.

It was a busy day at the office. The work went on until far into the evening.

Even when the household assembled at the supper-table, there was an interruption. A messenger called with a pressing letter, which made it immediately necessary to refer to the past correspondence of the firm. Mr. Keller rose from the table. 'The Abstracts will take up less time to examine,' he said to Mrs. Wagner; 'you have them in your desk, I think?' She at once turned to Jack, and ordered him to produce the key. He took it from his bag, under the watchful eyes of Madame Fontaine, observing him from

the opposite side of the table. 'I should have preferred opening the desk myself,' Jack remarked when Mr. Keller had left the room; 'but I suppose I must give way to the master. Besides, he hates me.'

The widow was quite startled by this strong assertion. 'How can you say so?' she exclaimed. 'We all like you, Jack. Come and have a little wine, out of my glass.'

Jack refused this proposal. 'I don't want wine,' he said; 'I am sleepy and cold —I want to go to bed.'

Madame Fontaine was too hospitably inclined to take No for an answer. Only a little drop,' she pleaded. 'You look so cold.'

'Surely you forget what I told you?'

Mrs. Wagner interposed. 'Wine first excites, and then stupefies him. The last time I tried it, he was as dull and heavy as if I had given him laudanum. I thought I mentioned it to you.' She turned to Jack. 'You look sadly tired, my poor little man. Go to bed at once.'

'Without the key?' cried Jack indignantly. 'I hope I know my duty better than that.'

Mr. Keller returned, perfectly satisfied with the result of his investigation. 'I knew it!' he said. 'The mistake is on the side of our clients; I have sent them the proof of it.'

He handed back the key to Mrs. Wagner. She at once transferred it to Jack. Mr. Keller shook his head in obstinate disap-

proval. 'Would you run such a risk as that?' he said to Madame Fontaine, speaking in French. 'I should be afraid,' she replied in the same language. Jack secured the key in his bag, kissed his mistress's hand, and approached the door on his way to bed. 'Won't you wish me good-night?' said the amiable widow. 'I didn't know whether German or English would do for you,' Jack answered; 'and I can't speak your unknown tongue.'

He made one of his fantastic bows, and left the room. 'Does he understand French?' Madame Fontaine asked. 'No,' said Mrs. Wagner; 'he only understood that you and Mr. Keller had something to conceal from him.'

In due course of time the little party at

the supper-table rose, and retired to their rooms. The first part of the night passed as tranquilly as usual. But, between one and two in the morning, Mrs. Wagner was alarmed by a violent beating against her door, and a shrill screaming in Jack's voice. 'Let me in! I want a light—I've lost the keys!'

She called out to him to be quiet, while she put on her dressing-gown, and struck a light. They were fortunately on the side of the house occupied by the offices, the other inhabited bedchambers being far enough off to be approached by a different staircase. Still, in the silence of the night, Jack's reiterated cries of terror and beatings at the door might possibly reach the ears of a light sleeper. She pulled him into the room

and closed the door again, with an impetuosity that utterly confounded him. 'Sit down there, and compose yourself!' she said sternly. 'I won't give you the light until you are perfectly quiet. You disgrace *me* if you disturb the house.'

Between cold and terror, Jack shuddered from head to foot. 'May I whisper?' he asked, with a look of piteous submission.

Mrs. Wagner pointed to the last living embers in the fireplace. She knew by experience the tranquillising influence of giving him something to do. 'Rake the fire together,' she said; 'and warm yourself first.'

He obeyed, and then laid himself down in his dog-like way on the rug. A quarter of an hour, at least, passed before his

mistress considered him to be in a fit state to tell his story. There was little or nothing to relate. He had put his bag under his pillow as usual; and (after a long sleep) he had woke with a horrid fear that something had happened to the keys. He had felt in vain for them under the pillow, and all over the bed, and all over the floor. 'After that,' he said, 'the horrors got hold of me; and I am afraid I went actually mad, for a little while. I'm all right now, if you please. See! I'm as quiet as a bird with its head under its wing.'

Mrs. Wagner took the light, and led the way to his little room, close by her own bedchamber. She lifted the pillow—and there lay the leather bag, exactly where he had placed it when he went to bed.

Jack's face, when this discovery revealed itself, would have pleaded for mercy with a far less generous woman than Mrs. Wagner. She took his hand. 'Get into bed again,' she said kindly; 'and the next time you dream, try not to make a noise about it.'

No! Jack refused to get into bed again, until he had been heard in his own defence. He dropped on his knees, and held up his clasped hands, as if he was praying.

'When you first taught me to say my prayers,' he answered, 'you said God would hear me. As God hears me now Mistress, I was wide awake when I put my hand under the pillow—and the bag was *not* there. Do you believe me?'

Mrs. Wagner was strongly impressed by

the simple fervour of this declaration. It was no mere pretence, when she answered that she did believe him. At her suggestion, the bag was unstrapped and examined. Not only the unimportant keys (with another one added to their number) but the smaller key which opened her desk were found safe inside. 'We will talk about it to-morrow,' she said. Having wished him good-night, she paused in the act of opening the door, and looked at the lock. There was no key in it, but there was another protection in the shape of a bolt underneath. 'Did you bolt your door when you went to bed?' she asked.

'No.'

The obvious suspicion, suggested by this negative answer, crossed her mind.

'What has become of the key of your door?' she inquired next.

Jack hung his head. 'I put it along with the other keys,' he confessed, 'to make the bag look bigger.'

Alone again in her own room, Mrs. Wagner stood by the re-animated fire, thinking.

While Jack was asleep, any person, with a soft step and a delicate hand, might have approached his bedside, when the house was quiet for the night, and have taken his bag. And, again, any person within hearing of the alarm that he had raised, some hours afterwards, might have put the bag back, while he was recovering himself in Mrs. Wagner's room. Who could have been near enough to hear the alarm? Somebody in the empty

bedrooms above? Or somebody in the solitary offices below? If a theft had really been committed, the one likely object of it would be the key of the desk. This pointed to the probability that the alarm had reached the ears of the thief in the offices. Was there any person in the house, from the honest servants upwards, whom it would be reasonably possible to suspect of theft? Mrs. Wagner returned to her bed. She was not a woman to be daunted by trifles—but on this occasion her courage failed her when she was confronted by her own question.

CHAPTER X.

THE office-hours, in the winter-time, began at nine o'clock. From the head-clerk to the messenger, not one of the persons employed slept in the house: it was Mr. Keller's wish that they should all be absolutely free to do what they liked with their leisure time in the evening: 'I know that I can trust them, from the oldest to the youngest man in my service,' he used to say; 'and I like to show it.'

Under these circumstances, Mrs. Wagner had only to rise earlier than usual, to be

sure of having the whole range of the offices entirely to herself. At eight o'clock, with Jack in attendance, she was seated at her desk, carefully examining the different objects that it contained.

Nothing was missing; nothing had been moved out of its customary place. No money was kept in the desk. But her valuable watch, which had stopped on the previous day, had been put there, to remind her that it must be sent to be cleaned. The watch, like everything else, was found in its place. If some person had really opened her desk in the night, no common thief had been concerned, and no common object had been in view.

She took the key of the iron safe from its pigeon-hole, and opened the door. Her

knowledge of the contents of this repository was far from being accurate. The partners each possessed a key, but Mr. Keller had many more occasions than Mrs. Wagner for visiting the safe. And to make a trustworthy examination more difficult still, the mist of the early morning was fast turning into a dense white fog.

Of one thing, however, Mrs. Wagner was well aware—a certain sum of money, in notes and securities, was always kept in this safe as a reserve fund. She took the tin box in which the paper money was placed close to the light, and counted its contents. Then, replacing it in the safe, she opened the private ledger next, to compare the result of her counting with the entry relating to the Fund.

Being unwilling to cause surprise, perhaps to excite suspicion, by calling for a candle before the office hours had begun, she carried the ledger also to the window. There was just light enough to see the sum total in figures. To her infinite relief, it exactly corresponded with the result of her counting. She secured everything again in its proper place; and, after finally locking the desk, handed the key to Jack. He shook his head, and refused to take it. More extraordinary still, he placed his bag, with all the other keys in it, on the desk, and said, 'Please keep it for me; I'm afraid to keep it myself.'

Mrs. Wagner looked at him with a first feeling of alarm, which changed instantly to compassion. The tears were in his

eyes; his sensitive vanity was cruelly wounded. 'My poor boy,' she said gently, 'what is it that troubles you?'

The tears rolled down Jack's face. 'I'm a wretched creature,' he said; 'I'm not fit to keep the keys, after letting a thief steal them last night. Take them back, Mistress —I'm quite broken-hearted. Please try me again, in London.'

'A thief?' Mrs. Wagner repeated. 'Haven't you seen me examine everything? And mind, if there *had* been any dishonest person about the house last night, the key of my desk is the only key that a thief would have thought worth stealing. I happen to be sure of that. Come! come! don't be down-hearted. You know I never deceive you—and I say you are

quite wrong in suspecting that your bag was stolen last night.'

Jack solemnly lifted his hand, as his custom was in the great emergencies of his life. 'And *I* say,' he reiterated, 'there is a thief in the house. And you will find it out before long. When we are back in London again, I will be Keeper of the Keys. Never, never, never more, here!'

It was useless to contend with him; the one wise course was to wait until his humour changed. Mrs. Wagner locked up his bag, and put the key of the desk back in her pocket. She was not very willing to own it even to herself—Jack's intense earnestness had a little shaken her.

After breakfast that morning, Minna lingered at the table, instead of following

her mother upstairs as usual. When Mr. Keller also had left the room, she addressed a little request of her own to Mrs. Wagner.

'I have got a very difficult letter to write,' she said, 'and Fritz thought you might be kind enough to help me.'

'With the greatest pleasure, my dear. Does your mother know of this letter?'

'Yes; it was mamma who said I ought to write it. But she is going out this morning; and, when I asked for a word of advice, she shook her head.. "They will think it comes from me," she said, "and the whole effect of it will be spoilt." It's a letter, Mrs. Wagner, announcing my marriage to mamma's relations here, who have behaved so badly to her—and she says they may do something for me, if I write to them as if

I had done it all out of my own head. I don't know whether I make myself understood?'

'Perfectly, Minna. Come to my writing-room, and we will see what we can do together.'

Mrs. Wagner led the way out. As she opened the door, Madame Fontaine passed her in the hall, in walking costume, with a small paper-packet in her hand.

'There is a pen, Minna. Sit down by me, and write what I tell you.'

The ink-bottle had been replenished by the person charged with that duty; and he had filled it a little too full. In a hurry to write the first words dictated, Minna dipped her pen too deeply in the bottle. On withdrawing it she not only blotted the paper, but scattered some of the superfluous ink

over the sleeve of Mrs. Wagner's dress. 'Oh, how awkward I am!' she exclaimed. 'Excuse me for one minute. Mamma has got something in her dressing-case which will take out the marks directly.'

She ran upstairs, and returned with the powder which her mother had used, in erasing the first sentences on the label attached to the blue-glass bottle. Mrs. Wagner looked at the printed instructions on the little paper box, when the stains had been removed from her dress, with some curiosity. 'Macula Exstinctor,' she read, 'or Destroyer of Stains. Partially dissolve the powder in a teaspoonful of water; rub it well over the place, and the stain will disappear, without taking out the colour of the dress. This extraordinary specific may

also be used for erasing written characters without in any way injuring the paper, otherwise than by leaving a slight shine on the surface.'

'Is this to be got in Frankfort?' asked Mrs. Wagner. 'I only know lemon-juice as a remedy against ink-marks, when I get them on my dress or my fingers.'

'Keep it, dear Mrs. Wagner. I can easily buy another box for mamma where we got this one, at a chemist's in the Zeil. See how easily I can take off the blot that I dropped on the paper! Unless you look very close, you can hardly see the shine—and the ink has completely disappeared.'

'Thank you, my dear. But your mother might meet with some little accident, and might want your wonderful powder when I

am out of the way. Take it back when we have done our letter. And we will go to the chemist together and buy another box in a day or two.'

On the thirtieth of December, after dinner, Mr. Keller proposed a toast—'Success to the adjourned wedding-day!' There was a general effort to be cheerful, which was not rewarded by success. Nobody knew why; but the fact remained that nobody was really merry.

On the thirty-first, there was more hard work at the office. The last day of the old year was the day on which the balance was struck.

Towards noon, Mr. Keller appeared in Mrs. Wagner's office, and opened the safe.

'We must see about the Reserve Fund,' he said; 'I will count the money, if you will open the ledger and see that the entry is right. I don't know what you think, but my idea is that we keep too much money lying idle in these prosperous times. What do you say to using half of the customary fund for investment? By the by, our day for dividing the profits is not your day in London. When my father founded this business, the sixth of January was the chosen date—being one way, among others, of celebrating his birthday. We have kept to the old custom, out of regard for his memory; and your worthy husband entirely approved of our conduct. I am sure you agree with him?'

'With all my heart,' said Mrs. Wagner.

'Whatever my good husband thought, I think.'

'Mr. Keller proceeded to count the Fund. 'Fifteen thousand florins,' he announced. 'I thought it had been more than that. If poor dear Engelman had been here—Never mind! What does the ledger say?'

'Fifteen thousand florins,' Mrs. Wagner answered.

'Ah, very well, my memory must have deceived me. This used to be Engelman's business; and you are as careful as he was —I can say no more.'

Mr. Keller replaced the money in the safe, and hastened back to his own office.

Mrs. Wagner raised one side of the ledger off the desk to close the book—stopped to think—and laid it back again.

The extraordinary accuracy of Mr. Keller's memory was proverbial in the office. Remembering the compliment which he had paid to her sense of responsibility as Mr. Engelman's successor, Mrs. Wagner was not quite satisfied to take it for granted that he had made a mistake—even on the plain evidence of the ledger. A reference to the duplicate entry, in her private account-book, would at once remove even the shadow of a doubt.

The last day of the old year was bright and frosty; the clear midday light fell on the open page before her. She looked again at the entry, thus recorded in figures—'15,000 florins'—and observed a trifling circumstance which had previously escaped her.

'The strokes which represented the figures

'15' were unquestionably a little, a very little, thicker than the strokes which represented the three zeros or 'noughts' that followed. Had a hair got into the pen of the head-clerk, who had made the entry? or was there some trifling defect in the paper, at that particular part of the page?

She once more raised one side of the ledger so that the light fell at an angle on the writing. There *was* a difference between that part of the paper on which the figures '15' were written, and the rest of the page —and the difference consisted in a slight shine on the surface.

The side of the ledger dropped from her hand on the desk. She left the office, and ran upstairs to her own room. Her private account-book had not been wanted lately

—it was locked up in her dressing-case. She took it out, and referred to it. There was the entry as she had copied it, and compared it with the ledger—'20,000 florins.'

'Madame Fontaine!' she said to herself in a whisper.

CHAPTER XI.

THE New Year had come.

On the morning of the second of January, Mrs. Wagner (on her way to the office at the customary hour) was stopped at the lower flight of stairs by Madame Fontaine—evidently waiting with a purpose.

'Pardon me,' said the widow, 'I must speak to you.'

'These are business hours, madam; I have no time to spare.'

Without paying the slightest heed to this reply—impenetrable, in the petrifying de-

spair that possessed her, to all that looks, tones, and words could say—Madame Fontaine stood her ground, and obstinately repeated, 'I must speak to you.'

Mrs. Wagner once more refused. 'All that need be said between us *has* been said,' she answered. 'Have you replaced the money?'

'That is what I want to speak about?'

'Have you replaced the money?'

'Don't drive me mad, Mrs. Wagner! As you hope for mercy yourself, at the hour of your death, show mercy to the miserable woman who implores you to listen to her! Return with me as far as the drawing-room. At this time of day, nobody will disturb us there. Give me five minutes!'

Mrs. Wagner looked at her watch.

'I will give you five minutes. And mind, I mean five minutes. Even in trifles, *I* speak the truth.'

They returned up the stairs, Mrs. Wagner leading the way.

There were two doors of entrance to the drawing-room—one, which opened from the landing, and a smaller door, situated at the farther end of the corridor. This second entrance communicated with a sort of alcove, in which a piano was placed, and which was only separated by curtains from the spacious room beyond. Mrs. Wagner entered by the main door, and paused, standing near the fire-place. Madame Fontaine, following her, turned aside to the curtains, and looked through. Having assured herself that no person was in the recess, she ap-

proached the fire-place, and said her first words.

'You told me just now, madam, that *you* spoke the truth. Does that imply a doubt of the voluntary confession——?'

'You made no voluntary confession,' Mrs. Wagner interposed. 'I had positive proof of the theft that you have committed, when I entered your room. I showed you my private account-book, and when you attempted to defend yourself, I pointed to the means of falsifying the figures in the ledger which lay before me in your own dressing-case. What do you mean by talking of a voluntary confession, after that?'

'You mistake me, madam. I was speaking of the confession of my motives—

the motives which, in my dreadful position, forced me to take the money, or to sacrifice the future of my daughter's life. I declare that I have concealed nothing from you. As you are a Christian woman, don't be hard on me!'

Mrs. Wagner drew back, and eyed her with an expression of contemptuous surprise.

'Hard on you?' she repeated. 'Do you know what you are saying? Have you forgotten already how I have consented to degrade myself? Must I once more remind you of *my* position? I am bound to tell Mr. Keller that his money and mine has been stolen; I am bound to tell him that he has taken into his house, and has respected and trusted, a thief. There is my plain duty—and I have consented to trifle with it. Are

you lost to all sense of decency? Have you no idea of the shame that an honest woman must feel, when she knows that her unworthy silence makes her—for the time at least—the accomplice of your crime? Do you think it was for your sake—not to be hard on You—that I have consented to this intolerable sacrifice? In the instant when I discovered you I would have sent for Mr. Keller, but for the sweet girl whose misfortune it is to be your child. Once for all, have you anything to say which it is absolutely necessary that I should hear? Have you, or have you not, complied with the conditions on which I consented—God help me!—to be what I am?'

Her voice faltered. She turned away proudly to compose herself. The look that

flashed out at her from the widow's eyes, the suppressed fury struggling to force its way in words through the widow's lips, escaped her notice. It was the first, and last, warning of what was to come—and she missed it.

'I wished to speak to you of your conditions,' Madame Fontaine resumed, after a pause. 'Your conditions are impossibilities. I entreat you, in Minna's interests—oh! not in mine!—to modify them.'

The tone in which those words fell from her lips was so unnaturally quiet, that Mrs. Wagner suddenly turned again with a start, and faced her.

'What do you mean by impossibilities? Explain yourself.'

'You are an honest woman, and I am a thief,' Madame Fontaine answered, with the

same ominous composure. 'How can explanations pass between you and me? Have I not spoken plainly enough already? In my position, I say again, your conditions are impossibilities—especially the first of them.'

There was something in the bitterly ironical manner which accompanied this reply that was almost insolent. Mrs. Wagner's colour began to rise for the first time. 'Honest conditions are always possible conditions to honest people,' she said.

Perfectly unmoved by the reproof implied in those words, Madame Fontaine persisted in pressing her request. 'I only ask you to modify your terms,' she explained. 'Let us understand each other. Do you still insist on my replacing what I

have taken, by the morning of the sixth of this month?'

'I still insist.'

'Do you still expect me to resign my position here as director of the household, on the day when Fritz and Minna have become man and wife?'

'I still expect that.'

'Permit me to set the second condition aside for awhile. Suppose I fail to replace the five thousand florins in your reserve fund?'

'If you fail, I shall do my duty to Mr. Keller, when we divide profits on the sixth of the month.'

'And you will expose me in this way, knowing that you make the marriage impossible—knowing that you doom my

daughter to shame and misery for the rest of her life?'

'I shall expose you, knowing that I have kept your guilty secret to the last moment —and knowing what I owe to my partner and to myself. You have still four days to spare. Make the most of your time.'

'I can do absolutely nothing in the time.'

'Have you tried?'

The suppressed fury in Madame Fontaine began to get beyond her control.

'Do you think I should have exposed myself to the insults that you have heaped upon me if I had *not* tried?' she asked. 'Can I get the money back from the man to whom it was paid at Würzburg, when my note fell due on the last day of the old year?

Do I know anybody who will lend me five thousand florins? Will my father do it? His house has been closed to me for twenty years—and my mother, who might have interceded for me, is dead. Can I appeal to the sympathy and compassion (once already refused in the hardest terms) of my merciless relatives in this city? I have appealed! I forced my way to them yesterday —I owned that I owed a sum of money which was more, far more, than I could pay. I drank the bitter cup of humiliation to the dregs—I even offered my daughter's necklace as security for a loan. Do you want to know what reply I received? The master of the house turned his back on me; the mistress told me to my face that she believed I had stolen the necklace. Was the punish-

ment of my offence severe enough, when I heard those words? Surely I have asserted some claim to your pity, at last? I only want more time. With a few months before me—with my salary as housekeeper, and the sale of my little valuables, and the proceeds of my work for the picture-dealers—I can, and will, replace the money. You are rich. What is a loan of five thousand florins to you? Help me to pass through the terrible ordeal of your day of reckoning on the sixth of the month! Help me to see Minna married and happy! And if you still doubt my word, take the pearl necklace as security that you will suffer no loss.'

Struck speechless by the outrageous audacity of this proposal, Mrs. Wagner

answered by a look, and advanced to the door. Madame Fontaine instantly stopped her.

'Wait!' cried the desperate creature. 'Think—before you refuse me!'

Mrs. Wagner's indignation found its way at last into words. 'I deserved this,' she said, 'when I allowed you to speak to me. Let me pass, if you please.'

Madame Fontaine made a last effort—she fell on her knees. 'Your hard words have roused my pride,' she said; 'I have forgotten that I am a disgraced woman; I have not spoken humbly enough. See! I am humbled now—I implore your mercy on my knees. This is not only *my* last chance; it is Minna's last chance. Don't blight my poor girl's life, for my fault!'

'For the second time, Madame Fontaine, I request you to let me pass.'

'Without an answer to my entreaties? Am I not even worthy of an answer?'

'Your entreaties are an insult. I forgive you the insult.'

Madame Fontaine rose to her feet. Every trace of agitation disappeared from her face and her manner. 'Yes,' she said, with the unnatural composure that was so strangely out of harmony with the terrible position in which she stood—'Yes, from your point of view, I can't deny that it may seem like an insult. When a thief, who has already robbed a person of money, asks that same person to lend her more money, by way of atoning for the theft, there is something very audacious (on the surface)

in such a request. I can't fairly expect you to understand the despair which wears such an insolent look. Accept my apologies, madam; I didn't see it at first in that light. I must do what I can, while your merciful silence still protects me from discovery—I must do what I can between this and the sixth of the month. Permit me to open the door for you.' She opened the drawing-room door, and waited.

Mrs. Wagner's heart suddenly quickened its beat.

Under what influence? Could it be fear? She was indignant with herself at the bare suspicion of it. Her face flushed deeply, under the momentary apprehension that some outward change might betray her. She left the room, without even trusting

herself to look at the woman who stood by the open door, and bowed to her with an impenetrable assumption of respect as she passed out.

Madame Fontaine remained in the drawing-room.

She violently closed the door with a stroke of her hand—staggered across the room to a sofa—and dropped on it. A hoarse cry of rage and despair burst from her, now that she was alone. In the fear that someone might hear her, she forced her handkerchief into her mouth, and fastened her teeth in it. The paroxysm passed, she sat up on the sofa, and wiped the perspiration from her face, and smiled to herself. 'It was well I stopped here,' she thought; 'I might have met someone on the stairs.'

As she rose to leave the drawing-room, Fritz's voice reached her from the far end of the corridor.

'You are out of spirits, Minna. Come in, and let us try what a little music will do for you.'

The door leading into the recess was opened. Minna's voice became audible next, on the inner side of the curtains.

'I am afraid I can't sing to-day, Fritz. I am very unhappy about mamma. She looks so anxious and so ill; and when I ask what is troubling her, she puts me off with an excuse.'

The melody of those fresh young tones, the faithful love and sympathy which the few simple words expressed, seemed to wring with an unendurable pain the whole

being of the mother who heard them. She lifted her hands above her head, and clenched them in the agony which could only venture to seek that silent means of relief. With swift steps, as if the sound of her daughter's voice was unendurable to her, she made for the door. But her movements, on ordinary occasions the perfection of easy grace, felt the disturbing influence of the agitation that possessed her. In avoiding a table on one side, as she passed it, she struck against a chair on the other.

Fritz instantly opened the curtains, and looked through. 'Why, here is mamma!' he exclaimed, in his hearty boyish way.

Minna instantly closed the piano, and hastened to her mother. When Madame

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being of the mother who heard them. She lifted her hands above her head, and clenched them in the agony which could only venture to seek that silent means of relief. With swift steps, as if the sound of her daughter's voice was unendurable to her, she made for the door. But her movements, on ordinary occasions the perfection of easy grace, felt the disturbing influence of the agitation that possessed her. In avoiding a table on one side, as she passed it, she struck against a chair on the other.

Fritz instantly opened the curtains, and looked through. 'Why, here is mamma!' he exclaimed, in his hearty boyish way.

Minna instantly closed the piano, and hastened to her mother. When Madame

As she rose to leave the drawing-room, Fritz's voice reached her from the far end of the corridor.

'You are out of spirits, Minna. Come in, and let us try what a little music will do for you.'

The door leading into the recess was opened. Minna's voice became audible next, on the inner side of the curtains.

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Fontaine looked at her, she paused, with an expression of alarm. 'Oh, how dreadfully pale and ill you look!' She advanced again, and tried to throw her arms round her mother, and kiss her. Gently, very gently, Madame Fontaine signed to her to draw back.

'Mamma! what have I done to offend you?'

'Nothing, my dear.'

'Then why won't you let me come to you?'

'No time now, Minna. I have something to do. Wait till I have done it.'

'Not even one little kiss, mamma?'

Madame Fontaine hurried out of the room without answering, and ran up the stairs without looking back. Minna's eyes

filled with tears. Fritz stood at the open door, bewildered.

'I wouldn't have believed it, if anybody had told me,' he said; 'your mother seems to be afraid to let you touch her.'

Fritz had made many mistaken guesses in his time—but, for once, he had guessed right. She *was* afraid.

CHAPTER XII.

As the presiding genius of the household, Madame Fontaine was always first in the room when the table was laid for the early German dinner. A knife with a speck on the blade, a plate with a suspicion of dirt on it, never once succeeded in escaping her observation. If Joseph folded a napkin carelessly, Joseph not only heard of it, but suffered the indignity of seeing his work performed for him to perfection by the housekeeper's dexterous hands.

On the second day of the New Year, she

was at her post as usual, and Joseph stood convicted of being wasteful in the matter of wine.

He had put one bottle of Ohligsberger on the table, at the place occupied by Madame Fontaine. The wine had already been used at the dinner and the supper of the previous day. At least two-thirds of it had been drunk. Joseph set down a second bottle on the opposite side of the table, and produced his corkscrew. Madame Fontaine took it out of his hand.

'Why do you open that bottle, before you are sure it will be wanted?' She asked sharply. 'You know that Mr. Keller and his son prefer beer.'

'There is so little left in the other bottle,'

Joseph pleaded; 'not a full tumbler altogether.'

'It may be enough, little as it is, for Mrs. Wagner and for me.' With that reply she pointed to the door. Joseph retired, leaving her alone at the table, until the dinner was ready to be brought into the room.

In five minutes more, the family assembled at their meal.

Joseph performed his customary duties sulkily, resenting the housekeeper's reproof. When the time came for filling the glasses, he had the satisfaction of hearing Madame Fontaine herself give him orders to draw the cork of a new bottle, after all.

Mrs. Wagner turned to Jack, standing behind her chair as usual, and asked for some

wine. Madame Fontaine instantly took up the nearly empty bottle by her side, and, half-filling a glass, handed it with grave politeness across the table. 'If you have no objection,' she said, 'we will finish one bottle, before we open another.'

Mrs. Wagner drank her small portion of wine at a draught. 'It doesn't seem to keep well, after it has once been opened,' she remarked, as she set down her glass. 'The wine has quite lost the good flavour it had yesterday.'

'It ought to keep well,' said Mr. Keller, speaking from his place at the top of the table. 'It's old wine, and good wine. Let me taste what is left.'

Joseph advanced to carry the remains of the wine to his master. But Madame Fon-

taine was beforehand with him. 'Open the other bottle directly,' she said—and rose so hurriedly to take the wine herself to Mr. Keller, that she caught her foot in her dress. In saving herself from falling, she lost her hold of the bottle. It broke in two pieces, and the little wine left in it ran out on the floor.

'Pray forgive me,' she said, smiling faintly. 'It is the first thing I have broken since I have been in the house.'

The wine from the new bottle was offered to Mrs. Wagner. She declined to take any: and she left her dinner unfinished on her plate. 'My appetite is very easily spoilt,' she said. 'I dare say there might have been something I didn't notice in the glass—or perhaps my taste may be out of order.'

'Very likely,' said Mr. Keller. 'You didn't find anything wrong with the wine yesterday. And there is certainly nothing to complain of in the new bottle,' he added, after tasting it. 'Let us have your opinion, Madame Fontaine.'

He filled the housekeeper's glass. 'I am a poor judge of wine,' she remarked humbly. 'It seems to me to be delicious.'

She put her glass down, and noticed that Jack's eyes were fixed on her, with a solemn and scrutinising attention. 'Do you see anything remarkable in me?' she asked lightly.

'I was thinking,' Jack answered.

'Thinking of what?'

'This is the first time I ever saw you in danger of tumbling down. It used to be a

remark of mine, at Würzburg, that you were as sure-footed as a cat. That's all.'

'Don't you know that there are exceptions to all rules?' said Madame Fontaine, as amiably as ever. 'I notice an exception in You,' she continued, suddenly changing the subject. 'What has become of your leather bag? May I ask if you have taken away his keys, Mrs. Wagner?'

She had noticed Jack's pride in his character as 'Keeper of the Keys.' There would be no fear of his returning to the subject of what he had remarked at Würzburg, if she stung him in *that* tender place. The result did not fail to justify her anticipations. In fierce excitement, Jack jumped up on the hind rail of his mistress's chair, eager for the most commanding position that

he could obtain, and opened his lips to tell the story of the night alarm. Before he could utter a word, Mrs. Wagner stopped him, with a very unusual irritability of look and manner. 'The question was put to *me*,' she said. 'I am taking care of the keys, Madame Fontaine, at Jack's own request. He can have them back again, whenever he chooses to ask for them.'

'Tell her about the thief,' Jack whispered.

'Be quiet!'

Jack was silenced at last. He retired to a corner. When he followed Mrs. Wagner as usual, on her return to her duties in the office, he struck his favourite place on the window seat with his clenched fist. 'The devil take Frankfort!' he said.

'What do you mean?'

'I hate Frankfort. You were always kind to me in London. You do nothing but lose your temper with me here. It's really too cruel. Why shouldn't I have told Mrs. Housekeeper how I lost my keys in the night? Now I come to think of it, I believe she was the thief.'

'Hush! hush! you must not say that. Come and shake hands, Jack, and make it up. I do feel irritable—I don't know what's the matter with me. Remember, Mr. Keller doesn't like your joining in the talk at dinner-time—he thinks it is taking a liberty. That was one reason why I stopped you. And you might have said something to offend Madame Fontaine—that was another. It will not be long before we go back to our

dear old London. Now, be a good boy, and leave me to my work.'

Jack was not quite satisfied; but he was quiet again.

For awhile he sat watching Mrs. Wagner at her work. His thoughts went back to the subject of the keys. Other people—the younger clerks and the servants, for example—might have observed that he was without his bag, and might have injuriously supposed that the keys had been taken away from him. Little by little, he reached the conclusion that he had been in too great a hurry perhaps to give up the bag. Why not prove himself to be worthier of it than ever, by asking to have it back again, and taking care always to lock the door of his bedroom at night? He looked at Mrs.

Wagner, to see if she paused over her work, so as to give him an opportunity of speaking to her.

She was not at work; she was not pausing over it. Her head hung down over her breast; her hands and arms lay helpless on the desk.

He got up and crossed the room on tip-toe, to look at her.

She was not asleep.

Slowly and silently, she turned her head. Her eyes stared at him awfully. Her mouth was a little crooked. There was a horrid grey paleness all over her face.

He dropped terrified on his knees, and clasped her dress in both hands. 'Oh, Mistress, Mistress, you are ill! What can I do for you?'

She tried to reassure him by a smile. Her mouth became more crooked still. 'I'm not well,' she said, speaking thickly and slowly, with an effort. 'Help me down. Bed. Bed.'

He held out his hands. With another effort, she lifted her arms from the desk, and turned to him on the high office-stool.

'Take hold of me,' she said.

'I have *got* hold of you, Mistress! I have got your hands in my hands. Don't you feel it?'

'Press me harder.'

He closed his hands on hers with all his strength. Did she feel it now?

Yes; she could just feel it now.

Leaning heavily upon him, she set her feet on the floor. She felt with them as if

she was feeling the floor, without quite understanding that she stood on it. The next moment, she reeled against the desk. 'Giddy,' she said, faintly and thickly. 'My head.' Her eyes looked at him, cold and big and staring. They maddened the poor affectionate creature with terror. The frightful shrillness of the past days in Bedlam was in his voice, as he screamed for help.

Mr. Keller rushed into the room from his office, followed by the clerks.

'Fetch the doctor, one of you,' he cried. 'Stop.'

He mastered himself directly, and called to mind what he had heard of the two physicians who had attended him, during his own illness. 'Not the old man,' he said.

'Fetch Doctor Dormann. Joseph will show you where he lives.' He turned to another of the clerks, supporting Mrs. Wagner in his arms while he spoke. 'Ring the bell in the hall—the upstairs bell for Madame Fontaine!'

CHAPTER XIII.

MADAME FONTAINE instantly left her room. Alarmed by the violent ringing of the bell, Minna followed her mother downstairs. The door of the office was open; they both saw what had happened as soon as they reached the hall. In sending for Madame Fontaine, Mr. Keller had placed a natural reliance on the experience and presence of mind of a woman of her age and character. To his surprise, she seemed to be as little able to control herself as her daughter. He was obliged to summon the assistance of the

elder of the female servants, in carrying Mrs. Wagner to her room. Jack went with them, holding one of his mistress's helpless hands.

His first paroxysm of terror had passed away with the appearance of Mr. Keller and the clerk, and had left his weak mind stunned by the shock that had fallen on it. He looked about him vacantly. Once or twice, on the slow sad progress up the stairs, they heard him whispering to himself, 'She won't die—no, no, no; she won't die.' His only consolation seemed to be in that helpless confession of faith. When they laid her on the bed, he was close at the side of the pillow. With an effort, her eyes turned on him. With an effort she whispered, 'The Key!'

He understood her—the desk downstairs

had been left unlocked. 'I'll take care of the key, Mistress; I'll take care of them all,' he said. As he left the room, he repeated his comforting words, 'She won't die—no, no, no; she won't die.' He locked the desk and placed the key with the rest in his bag.

Leaving the office with the bag slung over his shoulder, he stopped at the door of the dining-room, on the opposite side of the hall. His head felt strangely dull. A sudden suspicion that the feeling might show itself in his face, made him change his mind and pause before he ascended the stairs. There was a looking-glass in the dining-room. He went straight to the glass, and stood before it, studying the reflection of his face with breathless anxiety. 'Do I look stupid-mad?' he asked himself. 'They won't let

me be with her; they'll send me away, if I look stupid-mad.'

He turned from the glass, and dropped on his knees before the nearest chair. 'Perhaps God will keep me quiet,' he thought, 'if I say my prayers.'

Repeating his few simple words, the poor creature's memory vaguely recalled to him the happy time when his good mistress had first taught him his prayers. The one best relief that could come to him, came—the relief of tears. Mr. Keller, descending to the hall in his impatience for the arrival of the doctor, found himself unexpectedly confronted by Mrs. Wagner's crazy attendant.

'May I go upstairs to Mistress?' Jack asked humbly. 'I've said my prayers, sir,

and I've had a good cry—and my head's easier now.'

Mr. Keller spoke to him more gently than usual. 'You had better not disturb your mistress before the doctor comes.'

'May I wait outside her door, sir? I promise to be very quiet.'

Mr. Keller consented by a sign. Jack took off his shoes, and noiselessly ascended the stairs. Before he reached the first landing, he turned and looked back into the hall. 'Mind this!' he announced very earnestly; 'I say she won't die—*I* say that!'

He went on up the stairs. For the first time Mr. Keller began to pity the harmless little man whom he had hitherto disliked. 'Poor wretch!' he said to himself, as he

paced up and down the hall, 'what will become of him, if she does die?'

In ten minutes more, Doctor Dormann arrived at the house.

His face showed that he thought badly of the case, as soon as he looked at Mrs. Wagner. He examined her, and made all the necessary inquiries, with the unremitting attention to details which was part of his professional character. One of his questions could only be answered generally. Having declared his opinion that the malady was paralysis, and that some of the symptoms were far from being common in his medical experience, he inquired if Mrs. Wagner had suffered from any previous attack of the disease. Mr. Keller could only reply that he had known her from the

time of her marriage, and that he had never (in the course of a long and intimate correspondence with her husband) heard of her having suffered from serious illness of any kind. Doctor Dormann looked at his patient narrowly, and looked back again at Mr. Keller with unconcealed surprise.

'At her age,' he said, 'I have never seen any first attack of paralysis so complicated and so serious as this.'

'Is there danger?' Mr. Keller asked in a whisper.

'She is not an old woman,' the doctor answered; 'there is always hope. The practice in these cases generally is to bleed. In this case, the surface of the body is cold; the heart's action is feeble—I don't like to try bleeding, if I can possibly avoid it.'

After some further consideration, he directed a system of treatment which, in some respects, anticipated the practice of a later and wiser time. Having looked at the women assembled round the bed—and especially at Madame Fontaine—he said he would provide a competent nurse, and would return to see the effect of the remedies in two hours.

Looking at Madame Fontaine, after the doctor had gone away, Mr. Keller felt more perplexed than ever. She presented the appearance of a woman who was completely unnerved. 'I am afraid you are far from well yourself,' he said.

'I have not felt well, sir, for some time past,' she answered, without looking at him.

'You had better try what rest and quiet will do for you,' he suggested.

'Yes, I think so.' With that reply—not even offering, for the sake of appearances, to attend on Mrs. Wagner until the nurse arrived—she took her daughter's arm, and went out.

The woman-servant was fortunately a discreet person. She remembered the medical instructions, and she undertook all needful duties, until the nurse relieved her. Jack (who had followed the doctor into the room, and had watched him attentively) was sent away again for the time. He would go no farther than the outer side of the door. Mr. Keller passed him, crouched up on the mat, biting his nails. He was apparently thinking of the doctor. He said to himself,

'That man looked puzzled; that man knows nothing about it.'

In the meantime, Madame Fontaine reached her room.

'Where is Fritz?' she asked, dropping her daughter's arm.

'He has gone out, mamma. Don't send me away! You seem to be almost as ill as poor Mrs. Wagner—I want to be with you.'

Madame Fontaine hesitated. 'Do you love me with all your heart and soul?' she asked suddenly. 'Are you worthy of any sacrifice that a mother can make for her child?'

Before the girl could answer, she spoke more strangely still.

'Are you just as fond of Fritz as ever? would it break your heart if you lost him?'

Minna placed her mother's hand on her bosom.

'Feel it, mamma,' she said quietly. Madame Fontaine took her chair by the fire-side—seating herself with her back to the light. She beckoned to her daughter to sit by her. After an interval, Minna ventured to break the silence.

'I am very sorry for Mrs. Wagner, mamma; she has always been so kind to me. Do you think she will die?' Resting her elbows on her knees, staring into the fire, the widow lifted her head—looked round—and looked back again at the fire.

'Ask the doctor,' she said. 'Don't ask me.'

There was another long interval of silence. Minna's eyes were fixed anxiously

on her mother. Madame Fontaine remained immovable, still looking into the fire.

Afraid to speak again, Minna sought refuge from the oppressive stillness in a little act of attention. She took a fire-screen from the chimney-piece, and tried to place it gently in her mother's hand.

At that light touch, Madame Fontaine sprang to her feet as if she had felt the point of a knife. Had she seen some frightful thing? had she heard some dreadful sound? 'I can't bear it!' she cried—'I can't bear it any longer!'

'Are you in pain, mamma? Will you lie down on the bed?' Her mother only looked at her. She drew back trembling, and said no more.

Madame Fontaine crossed the room to the wardrobe. When she spoke next, she

was outwardly quite calm again. 'I am going out for a walk,' she said.

'A walk, mamma? It's getting dark already.'

'Dark or light, my nerves are all on edge—I must have air and exercise.'

'Let me go with you?'

She paced backwards and forwards restlessly, before she answered. 'The room isn't half large enough!' she burst out. 'I feel suffocated in these four walls. Space! space! I must have space to breathe in! Did you say you wished to go out with me? I want a companion, Minna. Don't you mind the cold?'

'I don't even feel it, in my fur cloak.'

'Get ready, then, directly.'

In ten minutes more, the mother and daughter were out of the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

DOCTOR DORMANN was punctual to his appointment. He was accompanied by a stranger, whom he introduced as a surgeon. As before, Jack slipped into the room, and waited in a corner, listening and watching attentively.

Instead of improving under the administration of the remedies, the state of the patient had sensibly deteriorated. On the rare occasions when she attempted to speak, it was almost impossible to understand her. The sense of touch seemed to be completely

lost—the poor woman could no longer feel the pressure of a friendly hand. And more ominous still, a new symptom had appeared; it was with evident difficulty that she performed the act of swallowing. Doctor Dormann turned resignedly to the surgeon.

'There is no other alternative,' he said; 'you must bleed her.'

At the sight of the lancet and the bandage, Jack started out of his corner. His teeth were fast set; his eyes glared with rage. Before he could approach the surgeon Mr. Keller took him sternly by the arm, and pointed to the door. He shook himself free—he saw the point of the lancet touch the vein. As the blood followed the incision, a cry of horror burst from him: he ran out of the room.

'Wretches! Tigers! How dare they take her blood from her! Oh, why am I only a little man? why am I not strong enough to fling the brutes out of the window? Mistress! Mistress! is there nothing I can do to help you?'

These wild words poured from his lips in the solitude of his little bedchamber. In the agony that he suffered, as the sense of Mrs. Wagner's danger now forced itself on him, he rolled on the floor, and struck himself with his clenched fists. And, again and again, he cried out to her, 'Mistress! Mistress! is there nothing I can do to help you?'

The strap that secured his keys became loosened, as his frantic movements beat the leather bag, now on one side, and now on

the other, upon the floor. The jingling of the keys rang in his ears. For a moment, he lay quite still. Then, he sat up on the floor. He tried to think calmly. There was no candle in the room. The nearest light came from a lamp on the landing below. He got up, and went softly down the stairs. Alone on the landing, he held up the bag and looked at it. 'There's something in my mind, trying to speak to me,' he said to himself. 'Perhaps, I shall find it in here?'

He knelt down under the light, and shook out the keys on the landing.

One by one he ranged them in a row, with a single exception. The key of the desk happened to be the first that he took up. He kissed it—it was *her* key—and put it back in the bag. Placing the others

before him, the duplicate key was the last in the line. The inscription caught his eye. He held it to the light and read 'Pink-Room Cupboard.'

The lost recollection now came back to him in intelligible form. The 'remedy' that Madame Fontaine had locked up—the precious 'remedy' made by the wonderful master who knew everything—was at his disposal. He had only to open the cupboard, and to have it in his own possession.

He threw the other keys back into the bag. They rattled as he ran down the lower flight of stairs. Opposite to the offices, he stopped and buckled them tight with the strap. No noise! Nothing to alarm Mrs. Housekeeper! He ascended the stairs in the other wing of the house, and paused again

when he approached Madame Fontaine's room. By this time, he was in the perilous fever of excitement, which was still well remembered among the authorities of Bedlam. Suppose the widow happened to be in her room? Suppose she refused to let him have the 'remedy'?

He looked at the outstretched fingers of his right hand. 'I am strong enough to throttle a woman,' he said, 'and I'll do it.'

He opened the door without knocking, without stopping to listen outside. Not a creature was in the room.

In another moment the fatal dose of 'Alexander's Wine,' which he innocently believed to be a beneficent remedy, was in his possession.

As he put it into the breast-pocket of his coat, the wooden chest caught his eye. He reached it down and tried the lid. The lid opened in his hand, and disclosed the compartments and the bottles placed in them. One of the bottles rose higher by an inch or two than any of the others. He drew that one out first to look at it, and discovered —the 'blue-glass bottle.'

From that moment all idea of trying the effect on Mrs. Wagner of the treacherous 'remedy' in his pocket vanished from his mind. He had secured the inestimable treasure, known to him by his own experience. Here was the heavenly bottle that had poured life down his throat, when he lay dying at Würzburg! This was the true and only doctor who had saved Mr. Keller's life,

when the poor helpless fools about his bed had given him up for lost! The Mistress, the dear Mistress, was as good as cured already. Not a drop more of her precious blood should be shed by the miscreant, who had opened his knife and wounded her. Oh, of all the colours in the world, there's no colour like blue! Of all the friends in the world, there never was such a good friend as this! He kissed and hugged the bottle as if it had been a living thing. He jumped up and danced about the room with it in his arms. Ha! what music there was in the inner gurgling and splashing of the shaken liquid, which told him that there was still some left for the Mistress! The striking of the clock on the mantelpiece sobered him at the height of his ecstasy. It told him that time

was passing. Minute by minute, Death might be getting nearer and nearer to her; and there he was, with Life in his possession, wasting the time, far from her bedside.

On his way to the door, he stopped. His eyes turned slowly towards the inner part of the room. They rested on the open cupboard—and then they looked at the wooden chest, left on the floor.

Suppose the housekeeper should return, and see the key in the cupboard, and the chest with one of the bottles missing?

His only counsellor at that critical moment was his cunning; stimulated into action by the closely related motive powers of his inbred vanity, and his devotion to the benefactress whom he loved.

The chance of being discovered by

Madame Fontaine never entered into his calculations. He cared nothing whether she discovered him or not—he had got the bottle, and woe to her if she tried to take it away from him! What he really dreaded was, that the housekeeper might deprive him of the glory of saving Mrs. Wagner's life, if she found out what had happened. She might follow him to the bedside; she might claim the blue-glass bottle as *her* property; she might say, 'I saved Mr. Keller; and now I have saved Mrs. Wagner. This little man is only the servant who gave the dose, which any other hand might have poured out in his place.'

Until these considerations occurred to him, his purpose had been to announce his wonderful discovery publicly at Mrs.

Wagner's bedside. This intention he now abandoned, without hesitation. He saw a far more inviting prospect before him. What a glorious position for him it would be, if he watched his opportunity of administering the life-giving liquid privately—if he waited till everybody was astonished at the speedy recovery of the suffering woman—and then stood up before them all, and proclaimed himself as the man who had restored her to health!

He replaced the chest, and locked the cupboard; taking the key away with him. Returning to the door, he listened intently to make sure that nobody was outside, and kept the blue-glass bottle hidden under his coat when he ventured at last to leave the room. He reached the other wing of the house, and

ascended the second flight of stairs, without interruption of any kind. Safe again in his own room, he watched through the half-opened door.

Before long, Doctor Dormann and the surgeon appeared, followed by Mr. Keller. The three went downstairs together. On the way, the Doctor mentioned that he had secured a nurse for the night.

Still keeping the bottle concealed, Jack knocked softly at the door, and entered Mrs. Wagner's room.

He first looked at the bed. She lay still and helpless, noticing nothing; to all appearance, poor soul, a dying woman. The servant was engaged in warming something over the fire. She shook her head gloomily, when Jack inquired if any favour-

able change had taken place in his absence. He sat down, vainly trying to discover how he might find the safe opportunity of which he was in search.

The slow minutes followed each other. After a little while the woman-servant looked at the clock. 'It's time Mrs. Wagner had her medicine,' she remarked, still occupied with her employment at the fire. Jack saw his opportunity in those words. 'Please let me give the medicine,' he said.

'Bring it here,' she answered; 'I mustn't trust anybody to measure it out.'

'Surely I can give it to her, now it's ready?' Jack persisted.

The woman handed the glass to him. 'I can't very well leave what I am about,' she said. 'Mind you are careful not to

spill any of it. She's as patient as a lamb, poor creature. If she can only swallow it, she won't give you any trouble.'

Jack carried the glass round to the farther side of the bed, so as to keep the curtains as a screen between himself and the fire-place. He softly dropped out the contents of the glass on the carpet, and filled it again from the bottle concealed under his coat. Waiting a moment after that, he looked towards the door. What if the housekeeper came in, and saw the blue-glass bottle? He snatched it up—an empty bottle now—and put it in the side-pocket of his coat, and arranged his handkerchief so as to hide that part of it which the pocket was not deep enough to conceal. 'Now!' he thought to himself, 'now I may

venture!' He gently put his arm round Mrs. Wagner, and raised her on the pillow.

'Your medicine, dear Mistress,' he whispered. 'You will take it from poor Jack, won't you?'

The sense of hearing still remained. Her vacant eyes turned towards him by slow degrees. No outward expression answered to her thought; she could show him that she submitted, and she could do no more.

He dashed away the tears that blinded him. Supported by the firm belief that he was saving her life, he took the glass from the bedside-table and put it to her lips.

With painful efforts, with many intervals of struggling breath, she swallowed the contents of the glass, by a few drops at a

time. He held it up under the shadowed lamplight, and saw that it was empty.

As he laid her head back on the pillows, he ventured to touch her cold cheek with his lips. 'Has she taken it?' the woman asked. He was just able to answer 'Yes'—just able to look once more at the dear face on the pillow. The tumult of contending emotions, against which he had struggled thus far, overpowered his utmost resistance. He ran to hide the hysterical passion in him, forcing its way to relief in sobs and cries, on the landing outside.

In the calmer moments that followed, the fear still haunted him that Madame Fontaine might discover the empty compartment in the medicine-chest—might search every room in the house for the lost bottle—and

might find it empty. Even if he broke it, and threw the fragments into the dust-hole, the fragments might be remarked for their beautiful blue colour, and the discovery might follow. Where could he hide it?

While he was still trying to answer that question, the hours of business came to an end, and the clerks were leaving the offices below. He heard them talking about the hard frost as they went out. One of them said there were blocks of ice floating down the river already. The river! It was within a few minutes' walk of the house. Why not throw the bottle into the river?

He waited until there was perfect silence below, and then stole downstairs. As he opened the door, a strange man met him,

ascending the house-steps, with a little travelling bag in his hand.

'Is this Mr. Keller's?' asked the strange man.

He was a jolly-looking old fellow with twinkling black eyes and a big red nose. His breath was redolent of the smell of wine, and his thick lips expanded into a broad grin, when he looked at Jack.

'My name's Schwartz,' he said; 'and here in this bag are my sister's things for the night.'

'Who is your sister?' Jack inquired.

Schwartz laughed. 'Quite right, little man, how should you know who she is? My sister's the nurse. She's hired by Doctor Dormann, and she'll be here in an hour's time. I say! that's a pretty bottle

you're hiding there under your coat. Is there any wine in it?'

Jack began to tremble. He had been discovered by a stranger. Even the river might not be deep enough to keep his secret now!

'The cold has got into my inside,' proceeded the jolly old man. 'Be a good little fellow—and give us a drop!'

'I haven't got any wine in it,' Jack answered.

Schwartz laid his forefinger confidentially along the side of his big red nose. 'I understand,' he said, 'you were just going out to get some.' He put his sister's bag on one of the chairs in the hall, and took Jack's arm in the friendliest manner. 'Suppose you come along with me?' he sug-

gested. 'I am the man to help you to the best tap of wine in Frankfort. Bless your heart! you needn't feel ashamed of being in my company. My sister's a most respectable woman. And what do you think I am? I'm one of the city officers. Ho! ho! just think of that! I'm not joking, mind. The regular Night Watchman at the Deadhouse is ill in bed, and they're obliged to find somebody to take his place till he gets well again. I'm the Somebody. They tried two other men—but the Deadhouse gave them the horrors. My respectable sister spoke for me, you know. "The regular watchman will be well in a week," she says; "try him for a week." And they tried me. I'm not proud, though I *am* a city officer. Come along—and let me carry the bottle.'

'The bottle' again! And, just as this intrusive person spoke of it, Joseph's voice was audible below, and Joseph's footsteps gave notice that he was ascending the kitchen stairs. In the utter bewilderment of the moment, Jack ran out, with the one idea of escaping the terrible possibilities of discovery in the hall. He heard the door closed behind him—then heavy boots thumping the pavement at a quick trot. Before he had got twenty yards from the house, the vinous breath of Schwartz puffed over his shoulder, and the arm of the deputy-night-watchman took possession of him again.

'Not too fast—I'm nimble on my legs for a man of my age—but not too fast,' said his new friend. 'You're just the sort of little man I like. My sister will tell you

I take sudden fancies to people of your complexion. My sister's a most respectable woman. What's your name?—Jack? A capital name! Short, with a smack in it like the crack of a whip. *Do* give me the bottle!' He took it this time, without waiting to have it given to him. 'There! might drop it, you know,' he said. 'It's safe in my friendly hands. Where are you going to? You don't deal, I hope, at the public-house up that way? A word in your ear—the infernal scoundrel waters his wine. Here's the turning where the honest publican lives. I have the truest affection for him. I have the truest affection for you. Would you like to see the Deadhouse, some night? It's against the rules; but that don't matter. The cemetery overseer is a deal too fond of

his bed to turn out these cold nights and look after the watchman. It's just the right place for me. There's nothing to do but to drink, when you have got the liquor; and to sleep, when you haven't. The Dead who come our way, my little friend, have one great merit. We are supposed to help them, if they're perverse enough to come to life again before they're buried. There they lie in our house, with one end of the line tied to their fingers, and the other end at the spring of the alarm-bell. And they have never rung the bell yet—never once, bless their hearts, since the Deadhouse was built! Come and see me in the course of the week, and we'll drink a health to our quiet neighbours.'

They arrived at the door of the public-house.

'You've got some money about you, I suppose?' said Schwartz.

Madame Fontaine's generosity, when she gave Jack the money to buy a pair of gloves, had left a small surplus in his pocket. He made a last effort to escape from the deputy-watchman. 'There's the money,' he said. 'Give me back the bottle, and go and drink by yourself.'

Schwartz took him by the shoulder, and surveyed him from head to foot by the light of the public-house lamp. 'Drink by myself?' he repeated. 'Am I a jolly fellow, or am I not? Yes, or No?'

'Yes,' said Jack, trying hard to release himself.

Schwartz tightened his hold. 'Did you ever hear of a jolly fellow, who left his friend at the public-house door?' he asked.

'If you please, sir, I don't drink,' Jack pleaded.

Schwartz burst into a great roar of laughter, and kicked open the door of the public-house. 'That's the best joke I ever heard in my life,' he said. 'We've got money enough to fill the bottle, and to have a glass a-piece besides. Come along!'

He dragged Jack into the house. The bottle was filled; the glasses were filled. 'My sister's health! Long life and prosperity to my respectable sister! You can't refuse to drink the toast.' With those words, he put the fatal glass into his companion's hand.

Jack tasted the wine. It was cool; it

was good. Perhaps it was not so strong as Mr. Keller's wine? He tried it again —and emptied the glass.

An hour later, there was a ring at the door of Mr. Keller's house.

Joseph opened the door, and discovered a red-nosed old man, holding up another man who seemed to be three parts asleep, and who was quite unable to stand on his legs without assistance. The light of the hall lamp fell on this helpless creature's face, and revealed—Jack.

'Put him to bed,' said the red-nosed stranger. 'And, look here, take charge of the bottle for him, or he'll break it. Somehow, the wine has all leaked out. Where's my sister's bag?'

'Do you mean the nurse?'

'Of course I do! I defy the world to produce the nurse's equal. Has she come?'

Joseph held up his hand with a gesture of grave reproof.

'Not so loud,' he said. 'The nurse has come too late.'

'Has the lady got well again?'

'The lady is dead.'

CHAPTER XV.

DOCTOR DORMANN had behaved very strangely.

He was the first person who made the terrible discovery of the death. When he came to the house, on his evening visit to his patient, Mr. Keller was in the room. Half an hour before, Mrs. Wagner had spoken to him. Seeing a slight movement of her lips, he had bent over her, and had just succeeded in hearing her few last words, 'Be kind to Jack.' Her eyelids dropped wearily, after the struggle to speak. Mr. Keller and the servant in attendance both

supposed that she had fallen asleep. The doctor's examination was not only prolonged beyond all customary limits of time in such cases—it was the examination (judging by certain expressions which escaped him) of a man who seemed to be unwilling to trust his own experience. The new nurse arrived, before he had definitely expressed his opinion; and the servant was instructed to keep her waiting downstairs. In expectation of the doctor's report, Mr. Keller remained in the bedroom. Doctor Dormann might not have noticed this circumstance, or might not have cared to conceal what was passing in his mind. In either case, when he spoke at last, he expressed himself in these extraordinary terms :—

'The second suspicious illness in this

house! And the second incomprehensible end to it!'

Mr. Keller at once stepped forward, and showed himself.

'Did you mean me to hear what you have just said?' he asked.

The doctor looked at him gravely and sadly. 'I must speak to you privately, Mr. Keller. Before we leave the room, permit me to send for the nurse. You may safely trust her to perform the last sad duties.'

Mr. Keller started. 'Good God!' he exclaimed, 'is Mrs. Wagner dead?'

'To my astonishment, she is dead.' He laid a strong emphasis on the first part of his reply.

The nurse having received her instructions, Mr. Keller led the way to his private room.

'In my responsible position,' he said, 'I may not unreasonably expect that you will explain yourself without reserve.'

'On such a serious matter as this,' Doctor Dormann answered, 'it is my duty to speak without reserve. The person whom you employ to direct the funeral will ask you for the customary certificate. I refuse to give it.'

This startling declaration roused a feeling of anger, rather than of alarm, in a man of Mr. Keller's resolute character. 'For what reason do you refuse?' he asked sternly.

'I am not satisfied, sir, that Mrs. Wagner has died a natural death. My experience entirely fails to account for the suddenly fatal termination of the disease, in the

case of a patient of her healthy constitution, and at her comparatively early age.'

'Doctor Dormann, do you suspect there is a poisoner in my house?'

'In plain words, I do.'

'In plain words on my side, I ask why?'

'I have already given you my reason.'

'Is your experience infallible? Have you never made a mistake?'

'I made a mistake, Mr. Keller (as it appeared at the time), in regard to your own illness.'

'What! you suspected foul play in my case too?'

'Yes; and, by way of giving you another reason, I will own that the suspicion is still in my mind. After what I have seen this evening—and *only* after that, observe—

I say the circumstances of your recovery are suspicious circumstances in themselves. Remember, if you please, that neither I nor my colleague really understood what was the matter with you; and that you were cured by a remedy, not prescribed by either of us. You were rapidly sinking; and your regular physician had left you. I had to choose between the certainty of your death, and the risk of letting you try a remedy, with the nature of which (though I did my best to analyse it) I was imperfectly acquainted. I ran the risk. The result has justified me—and up to this day, I have kept my misgivings to myself. I now find them renewed by Mrs. Wagner's death—and I speak.'

Mr. Keller's manner began to change.

His tone was sensibly subdued. He understood the respect which was due to the doctor's motives at last.

'May I ask if the symptoms of my illness resembled the symptoms of Mrs. Wagner's illness?' he said.

'Far from it. Excepting the nervous derangement, in both cases, there was no other resemblance in the symptoms. The conclusion, to my mind, is not altered by this circumstance. It simply leads me to the inference that more than one poison may have been used. I don't attempt to solve the mystery. I have no idea why your life has been saved, and Mrs. Wagner's life sacrificed—or what motives have been at work in the dark. Ask yourself—don't ask me—in what direction suspicion points.

I refuse to sign the certificate of death; and I have told you why.'

'Give me a moment,' said Mr. Keller, 'I don't shrink from my responsibility; I only ask for time to compose myself.'

It was the pride of his life to lean on nobody for help. He walked to the window; hiding all outward betrayal of the consternation that shook him to the soul. When he returned to his chair, he scrupulously avoided even the appearance of asking Doctor Dormann for advice.

'My course is plain,' he said quietly. 'I must communicate your decision to the authorities; and I must afford every assistance in my power to the investigation that will follow. It shall be done, when the magistrates meet to-morrow morning'

'We will go together to the town-hall, Mr. Keller. It is my duty to inform the burgomaster that this is a case for the special safeguards, sanctioned by the city regulations. I must also guarantee that there is no danger to the public health, in the removal of the body from your house.'

'The immediate removal?' Mr. Keller asked.

'No! The removal twenty-four hours after death.'

'To what place?'

'To the Deadhouse.'

CHAPTER XVI.

ACTING on the doctor's information, the burgomaster issued his order. At eight o'clock in the evening, on the third of January, the remains of Mrs. Wagner were to be removed to the cemetery-building, outside the Friedberg Gate of Frankfort.

Long before the present century, the dread of premature interment—excited by traditions of persons accidentally buried alive—was a widely-spread feeling among the people of Germany. In other cities besides Frankfort, the municipal authorities devised laws, the object of which was to make this

frightful catastrophe impossible. In the early part of the present century, these laws were re-enacted and revised by the City of Frankfort. The Deadhouse was attached to the cemetery, with a double purpose. First, to afford a decent resting-place for the corpse, when death occurred among the crowded residences of the poorer class of the population. Secondly, to provide as perfect a safeguard as possible against the chances of premature burial. The use of the Deadhouse (strictly confined to the Christian portion of the inhabitants) was left to the free choice of surviving relatives or representatives—excepting only those cases in which a doctor's certificate justified the magistrate in pronouncing an absolute decision. Even in the event of valid objections to the Deadhouse as a last

resting-place on the way to the grave, the doctor in attendance on the deceased person was subjected to certain restrictions in issuing his certificate. He was allowed to certify the death informally, for the purpose of facilitating the funeral arrangements. But he was absolutely forbidden to give his written authority for the burial, before the expiration of three nights from the time of the death; and he was further bound to certify that the signs of decomposition had actually begun to show themselves. Have these multiplied precautions, patiently applied in many German cities, through a long lapse of years, ever yet detected a case in which Death has failed to complete its unintelligible work? Let the answer be found in the cells of the dead. Pass, with the

mourners, through the iron gates—hear and see!

On the evening of the third, as the time approached for the arrival of the hearse, the melancholy stillness in the house was only broken by Mr. Keller's servants, below-stairs. Collecting together in one room, they talked confidentially, in low voices. An instinctive horror of silence, in moments of domestic distress, is, in all civilised nations, one of the marked characteristics of their class.

'In ten minutes,' said Joseph, 'the men from the cemetery will be here to take her away. It will be no easy matter to carry her downstairs on the couch.'

'Why is she not put in her coffin, like other dead people?' the housemaid asked.

'Because the crazy creature she brought with her from London is allowed to have his own way in the house,' Joseph answered irritably. 'If I had been brought to the door drunk last night, I should have been sent away this morning. If I had been mad enough to screech out, "She isn't dead; not one of you shall put her in a coffin!"—I should have richly deserved a place in the town asylum, and I should have got my deserts. Nothing of the sort for Master Jack. Mr. Keller only tells him to be quiet, and looks distressed. The doctor takes him away, and speaks to him in another room—and actually comes back converted to Jack's opinion!'

'You don't mean to tell us,' exclaimed

the cook, 'that the doctor said she wasn't dead?'

'Of course not. It was he who first found out that she *was* dead—I only mean that he let Jack have his own way. He asked me for a foot rule, and he measured the little couch in the bedroom. "It's no longer than the coffin" (he says); "and I see no objection to the body being laid on it, till the time comes for the burial." Those were his own words; and when the nurse objected to it, what do you think he said?—"Hold your tongue! A couch is a pleasanter thing all the world over than a coffin."'

'Blasphemous!' said the cook—'that's what I call it.'

'Ah, well, well!' the housemaid remarked, 'couch or coffin, she looks beautiful,

poor soul, in her black velvet robe, with the winter flowers in her pretty white hands. Who got the flowers? Madame Fontaine, do you think?'

'Bah! Madame Fontaine, indeed! Little Crazybrains went out (instead of eating the good dinner I cooked for him), and got the flowers. He wouldn't let anybody put them into her hands but himself—at least, so the nurse said. Has anybody seen Madame Housekeeper? Was she downstairs at dinner to-day, Joseph?'

'Not she! You mark my words,' said Joseph, 'there's some very serious reason for her keeping her room, on pretence of being ill.'

'Can you give any guess what it is?'

'You shall judge for yourself,' Joseph

answered. 'Did I tell you what happened yesterday evening, before Jack was brought home by the nurse's brother? I answered a ring at the door-bell—and there was Mr. Fritz in a towering passion, with Miss Minna on his arm looking ready to drop with fatigue. They rang for some wine; and I heard what he said to his father. It seems that Madame Fontaine had gone out walking in the dark and the cold (and her daughter with her), without rhyme or reason. Mr. Fritz met them, and insisted on taking Miss Minna home. Her mother didn't seem to care what he said or did. She went on walking by herself, as hard as she could lay her feet to the ground. And what do you suppose her excuse was? Her nerves were out of order! Mr. Fritz's notion is

that there is something weighing on her mind. An hour afterwards she came back to the house—and I found reason to agree with Mr. Fritz.'

'Tell us all about it, Joseph! What did she do?'

'You shall hear. It happened, just after I had seen crazy Jack safe in his bed. When I heard the bell, I was on my way downstairs, with a certain bottle in my hand. One of you saw the nurse's brother give it to me, I think? How he and Crazy-brains came into possession of it, mind you, is more than I know.'

'It looked just like the big medicine-bottle that cured Mr. Keller,' said the cook.

'It *was* the bottle; and, what is more, it smelt of wine, instead of medicine, and it

was empty. Well, I opened the door to Madame Housekeeper, with the bottle in my hand. The instant she set eyes on it, she snatched it away from me. She looked—I give you my word of honour, she looked as if she could have cut my throat. "You wretch!"—nice language to use to a respectable servant, eh?—"You wretch" (she says), "how did you come by this?" I made her a low bow. I said, "Civility costs nothing, ma'am; and sometimes buys a great deal" (severe, eh?). I told her exactly what had happened, and exactly what Schwartz had said. And then I ended with another hard hit. "The next time anything of yours is put into my hands," I said, "I shall leave it to take care of itself." I don't know whether she heard

me; she was holding the bottle up to the light. When she saw it was empty—well! I can't tell you, of course, what was passing in her mind. But this I can swear; she shivered and shuddered as if she had got a fit of the ague; and pale as she was when I let her into the house, I do assure you she turned paler still. I thought I should have to take *her* upstairs next. My good creatures, she's made of iron! Upstairs she went. I followed her as far as the first landing, and saw Mr. Keller waiting—to tell her the news of Mrs. Wagner's death, I suppose,. What passed between them I can't say. Mr. Fritz tells me she has never left her room since; and his father has not even sent a message to know how she is. What do you think of that?'

'I think Mr. Fritz was mistaken, when he told you she had never left her room,' said the housemaid. 'I am next to certain I heard her whispering, early this morning, with crazy Jack. Do you think she will follow the hearse to the Deadhouse, with Mr. Keller and the doctor?'

'Hush!' said Joseph. As he spoke, the heavy wheels of the hearse were heard in the street. He led the way to the top of the kitchen stairs. 'Wait here,' he whispered, 'while I answer the door—and you will see.'

Upstairs, in the drawing-room, Fritz and Minna were alone. Madame Fontaine's door, closed to everyone, was a closed door even to her daughter.

Fritz had refused to let Minna ask a second time to be let in. 'It will soon be your husband's privilege, my darling, to take care of you and comfort you,' he said. 'At this dreadful time, there must be no separation between you and me.'

His arm was round her; her head rested on his shoulder. She looked up at him timidly.

'Are you not going with them to the cemetery?' she asked.

'I am going to stay with you, Minna.'

'You were angry yesterday, Fritz, when you met me with my mother. Don't think the worse of her, because she is ill and troubled in her mind. You will make allowances for her as I do—won't you?'

'My sweet girl, there is nothing I won't do to please you! Kiss me, Minna. Again! again!'

On the higher floor of the house, Mr. Keller and the doctor were waiting in the chamber of death.

Jack kept his silent watch by the side of the couch, on which the one human creature who had befriended him lay hushed in the last earthly repose. Still, from time to time, he whispered to himself the sad senseless words, 'No, no, no—not dead, Mistress! Not dead yet!'

There was a soft knock at the door. The doctor opened it. Madame Fontaine stood before him. She spoke in dull monotonous tones—standing in the doorway;

refusing, when she was invited by a gesture, to enter the room.

'The hearse has stopped at the door,' she said. 'The men wish to ask you if they can come in.'

It was Joseph's duty to make this announcement. Her motive for forestalling him showed itself dimly in her eyes. They were not on Mr. Keller; not on the doctor; not on the couch. From the moment when the door had been opened to her, she fixed her steady look on Jack. It never moved until the bearers of the dead hid him from her when they entered the room.

The procession passed out. Jack, at Mr. Keller's command, followed last. Standing back at the doorway, Madame

Fontaine caught him by the arm as he came out.

'You were half asleep this morning,' she whispered. 'You are not half asleep now. How did you get the blue-glass bottle? I insist on knowing.'

'I won't tell you!'

Madame Fontaine altered her tone.

'Will you tell me who emptied the bottle? I have always been kind to you —it isn't much to ask. Who emptied it?'

His variable temper changed; he lifted his head proudly. Absolutely sure of his mistress's recovery, he now claimed the merit that was his due.

'*I* emptied it!'

'How did you empty it?' she asked

faintly. 'Did you throw away what was in it? Did you give it to anybody?'

He seized her in his turn—and dragged her to the railing of the corridor. 'Look there!' he cried, pointing to the bearers, slowly carrying their burden down the stairs. 'Do you see her, resting on her little sofa till she recovers? I gave it to *her!*'

He left her, and descended the stairs. She staggered back against the wall of the corridor. Her sight seemed to be affected. She groped for the stair-rail, and held by it. The air was wafted up through the open street-door. It helped her to rally her energies. She went down steadily, step by step, to the first landing—paused, and went down again. Arrived in the hall, she advanced to Mr. Keller, and spoke to him.

'Are you going to see the body laid in the Deadhouse?'

'Yes.'

'Is there any objection to my seeing it too?'

'The authorities have no objection to admitting friends of the deceased person,' Mr. Keller answered. He looked at her searchingly, and added, 'Do *you* go as a friend?'

It was rashly said; and he knew it. The magistrates had decided that the first inquiries should be conducted with the greatest secresy. For that day, at least, the inmates of the house were to enjoy their usual liberty of action (under private superintendence), so that no suspicion might be excited in the mind of the guilty person.

Conscious of having trifled with the serious necessity of keeping a guard over his tongue, Mr. Keller waited anxiously for Madame Fontaine's reply.

Not a word fell from her lips. There was a slight hardening of her face, and no more. In ominous silence, she turned about and ascended the stairs again

CHAPTER XVII.

THE departure from the house was interrupted by an unforeseen cause of delay.

Jack refused to follow the hearse, with Doctor Dormann and Mr. Keller. 'I won't lose sight of her!' he cried—'no! not for a moment! Of all living creatures, I must be the first to see her when she wakes.'

Mr. Keller turned to the doctor. 'What does he mean?'

The doctor, standing back in the shadow of the house, seemed to have some reason for not answering otherwise than by gesture. He touched his forehead significantly; and,

stepping out into the road, took Jack by the hand. The canopy of the hearse, closed at the sides, was open at either end. From the driver's seat, the couch became easily visible on looking round. With inexhaustible patience the doctor quieted the rising excitement in Jack, and gained him permission to take his place by the driver's side. Always grateful for kindness, he thanked Doctor Dormann, with the tears falling fast over his cheeks. 'I'm not crying for *her*,' said the poor little man; 'she will soon be herself again. But it's so dreadful, sir, to go out driving with her in such a carriage as this!'

The hearse moved away.

Doctor Dormann, walking with Mr. Keller, felt his arm touched, and, looking

round, saw the dimly-outlined figure of a woman beckoning to him. He drew back, after a word of apology to his companion, who continued to follow the hearse. The woman met him half way. He recognised Madame Fontaine.

'You are a learned man,' she began abruptly. 'Do you understand writing in cypher?'

'Sometimes.'

'If you have half an hour to spare this evening, look at that—and do me the favour of telling me what it means.'

She offered something to him, which appeared in the dim light to be only a sheet of paper. He hesitated to take it from her. She tried to press it on him.

'I found it among my husband's papers,'

she said. 'He was a great chemist, as you know. It might be interesting to you.'

He still hesitated.

'Are *you* acquainted with chemical science?' he asked.

'I am perfectly ignorant of chemical science.'

'Then what interest can you have in interpreting the cypher?'

'I have a very serious interest. There may be something dangerous in it, if it fell into unscrupulous hands. I want to know if I ought to destroy it.'

He suddenly took the paper from her. It felt stiff, like a sheet of cartridge-paper.

'You shall hear,' he said. 'In case of necessity, I will destroy it myself. Anything more?'

'One thing more. Does Jack go to the cemetery with you and Mr. Keller?'

'Yes.'

Walking away rapidly to overtake Mr. Keller, he looked behind him once or twice. The street was dimly lit, in those days, by a few oil lamps. He might be mistaken—but he thought that Madame Fontaine was following him.

On leaving the city, the lanterns were lit to guide the hearse along the road that led to the cemetery. The overseer met the bearers at the gates.

They passed, under a Doric portico, into a central hall. At its right-hand extremity, an open door revealed a room for the accommodation of mourners. Beyond this there was a courtyard; and, farther still, the

range of apartments devoted to the residence of the cemetery-overseer. Turning from the right-hand division of the building, the bearers led the way to the opposite extremity of the hall; passed through a second room for mourners; crossed a second courtyard beyond it; and, turning into a narrow passage, knocked at a closed door.

The door was opened by a watchman. He admitted them into a long room, situated between the courtyard at one end, and the cemetery at the other, and having ten side recesses which opened out of it. The long room was the Watchman's Chamber. The recesses were the cells which held the dead.

The couch was set down in the Watchman's Chamber. It was a novelty in the

Deadhouse; and the overseer asked for an explanation. Doctor Dormann informed him that the change had been made, with his full approval, to satisfy a surviving friend, and that the coffin would be provided before the certificate was granted for the burial.

While the persons present were all gathered round the doctor and the overseer, Madame Fontaine softly pushed open the door from the courtyard. After a look at the recesses—situated, five on either side of the length of the room, and closed by black curtains—she parted the curtains of the nearest recess to her, on her left hand; and stepped in without being noticed by anyone.

'You take the responsibility of the couch,

doctor, if the authorities raise any objection?' said the overseer.

This condition being complied with, he addressed himself to the watchman. 'The cells are all empty to-night, Duntzer, are they not?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Are you off duty, early or late this evening?'

'I am off duty in half an hour, sir.'

The overseer pointed to the couch. 'You can attend to this,' he said. 'Take the cell that is the nearest to you, where the watchman's chair is placed—Number Five.'

He referred to the fifth recess, at the upper end of the room on the right, counting from the courtyard door. The watch-

man looped up the black curtains, while the bearers placed the couch in the cell. This done, the bearers were dismissed.

Doctor Dormann pointed through the parted curtains to the lofty cell, ventilated from the top, and warmed (like the Watchman's Chamber) by an apparatus under the flooring. In the middle of the cell was a stand, placed there to support the coffin. Above the stand a horizontal bar projected, which was fixed over the doorway. It was furnished with a pulley, through which passed a long thin string hanging loosely downward at one end, and attached at the other to a small alarm-bell, placed over the door on the outer side—that is to say, on the side of the Watchman's Chamber.

'All the cells are equal in size,' said the

doctor to Mr. Keller, 'and are equally clean, and well warmed. The hot bath, in another room, is always ready; and a cabinet, filled with restorative applications, is close by. Now look at the watchman, and mark the care that is taken—in the event, for instance, of a cataleptic trance, and of a revival following it.'

Duntzer led the way into the cell. He took the loose end of the string, hanging from above, and attached to it two shorter and lighter strings, each of which terminated in five loose ends.

From these ten ends hung ten little thimble-shaped objects, made of brass.

First slightly altering the position of the couch on the stand, Duntzer lifted the dead hands—fitted the ten brass thimbles to the

fingers and the thumbs—and gently laid the hands back on the breast of the corpse. When he had looked up, and had satisfied himself of the exact connection between the hands and the line communicating with the alarm-bell outside, his duty was done. He left the cell; and, seating himself in his chair, waited the arrival of the night-watchman who was to relieve him.

Mr. Keller came out into the chamber, and spoke to the overseer.

'Is all done now?'

'All is done.'

'I should like, while I am here, to speak to you about the grave.'

The overseer bowed. 'You can see the plan of the cemetery,' he said, 'in my office on the other side of the building.'

Mr. Keller looked back into the cell. Jack had taken his place in it, when the couch had been carried in; and Doctor Dormann was quietly observing him. Mr. Keller beckoned to Jack. 'I am waiting for you,' he said. 'Come!'

'And leave Mistress?' Jack answered. 'Never!'

Mr, Keller was on the point of stepping into the cell, when Doctor Dormann took his arm, and led him away out of hearing.

'I want to ask you a question,' said the doctor. 'Was that poor creature's madness violent madness, when Mrs. Wagner took him out of the London asylum?'

'I have heard her say so.'

'Be careful what you do with him. Mrs. Wagner's death has tried his weak

brain seriously. I am afraid of a relapse into that violent madness—leave him to me.'

Mr. Keller left the room with the overseer. Doctor Dormann returned to the cell.

'Listen to me, Jack,' he said. 'If your mistress revives (as you think), I want you to see for yourself how she will tell it to the man who is on the watch.' He turned, and spoke to Duntzer. 'Is the alarm-bell set?'

'Yes, sir.'

The doctor addressed himself once more to Jack.

'Now look, and listen!' he said.

He delicately touched one of the brass thimbles, fitted to the fingers of the corpse. The bell rang instantly in the Watchman's Chamber.

The moment the man hears that,' he resumed, 'he will make the signal, which calls the overseer and the nurses to help your mistress back to life. At the same time, a messenger will be sent to Mr. Keller's house to tell you what has happened. You see how well she is taken care of—and you will behave sensibly, I am sure? I am going away. Come with me.'

Jack answered as he had answered Mr. Keller.

'Never!' he said.

He flung himself on the floor, and clasped his arms round one of the pillars supporting the stand on which the couch was placed. 'Tear my arms out of their sockets,' he cried—'you won't get me away till you've done that!'

Before the doctor could answer, footsteps

were heard in the Watchman's Chamber. A jolly voice asked a question. 'Any report for the night, Duntzer?'

Jack seemed to recognise the voice. He looked round eagerly.

'A corpse in Number Five,' Duntzer answered. 'And strangers in the cell. Contrary to the order for the night, as you know. I have reported them; it's your duty to send them away. Good night.'

A red-nosed old man looked in at the doorway of the cell. Jack started to his feet. 'Here's Schwartz!' he cried—'leave me with Schwartz!'

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE discovery of Jack agreeably surprised Schwartz, without in the least perplexing him.

His little friend (as he reasoned) had, no doubt, remembered the invitation to the Deadhouse, and had obtained admission through the interference of the strange gentleman who was with him. But who was the gentleman? The deputy night-watchman (though he might carry messages for his relative the nurse) was not personally acquainted with his sister's medical

patrons in Frankfort. He looked at the doctor with an expression of considerable doubt.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' he ventured to say, 'you're not a member of the city council, are you?'

'I have nothing to do with the city council.'

'And nothing to do with managing the Dead-house?'

'Nothing. I am Doctor Dormann.'

Schwartz snapped his clumsy fingers, as an appropriate expression of relief. 'All right, sir! Leave the little man with me—I'll take care of him.'

'Do you know this person?' asked the doctor, turning to Jack.

'Yes! yes! leave me here with him,' Jack answered eagerly. 'Good-night, sir—good-night!'

Doctor Dormann looked again at Jack's friend.

'I thought strangers were not allowed here at night,' he said.

'It's against the rules,' Schwartz admitted. 'But, Lord love you, sir, think of the dulness of this place! Besides, I'm only a deputy. In three nights more, the regular man will come on duty again. It's an awful job, doctor, watching alone here, all night. One of the men actually went mad, and hanged himself. To be sure he was a poet in his way, which makes it less remarkable. I'm not a poet myself—I'm

only a sociable creature. Leave little Jack with me! I'll send him home safe and sound—I feel like a father to him.'

The doctor hesitated. What was he to do? Jack had already returned to the cell in which his mistress lay. To remove him by the brutal exercise of main force was a proceeding from which Doctor Dormann's delicacy of feeling naturally recoiled—to say nothing of the danger of provoking that outbreak of madness against which the doctor had himself warned Mr. Keller. Persuasion he had already tried in vain. Delegated authority to control Jack had not been conferred on him. There seemed to be no other course than to yield.

'If you persist in your obstinacy,' he said to Jack, 'I must return alone to Mr.

Keller's house, and tell him that I have left you here with your friend.'

Jack was already absorbed in his own thoughts. He only repeated vacantly, 'Good-night.'

Doctor Dormann left the room. Schwartz looked in at his guest. 'Wait there for the present,' he said. 'The porter will be here directly: I don't want him to see you.'

The porter came in after an interval. 'All right for the night?' he asked.

'All right,' Schwartz answered.

The porter withdrew in silence. The night-watchman's reply was his authority for closing the gates of the Deadhouse until the next morning.

Schwartz returned to Jack—still watch-

ing patiently by the side of the couch. 'Was she a relation of yours?' he asked.

'All the relations in the world to me!' Jack burst out passionately. 'Father and mother—and brother and sister and wife.'

'Aye, aye? Five relations in one is what I call an economical family,' said Schwartz. 'Come out here, to the table. You stood treat last time—my turn now. I've got the wine handy. Yes, yes—she was a fine woman in her time, I dare say. Why haven't you put her into a coffin like other people?'

'Why?' Jack repeated indignantly. 'I couldn't prevent them from bringing her here; but I would have burnt the house down over their heads, if they had dared to put her into a coffin! Are you stupid enough

to suppose that Mistress is dead? Don't you know that I'm watching and waiting here till she wakes? Ah! I beg your pardon—you don't know. The rest of them would have let her die. I saved her life. Come here, and I'll tell you how.'

He dragged Schwartz into the cell. As the watchman disappeared from view, the wild white face of Madame Fontaine appeared between the curtains of her hiding-place, listening to Jack's narrative of the opening of the cupboard, and the discovery that had followed.

Schwartz humoured his little friend (evidently, as he now concluded, his crazy little friend), by listening in respectful silence. Instead of making any remark at the end, he mentioned once more that the wine was

handy. 'Come!' he reiterated; 'come to the table!'

Madame Fontaine drew back again behind the curtains. Jack remained obstinately in the cell. 'I mean to see it,' he said, 'the moment she moves.'

'Do you think your eyes will tell you?' Schwartz remonstrated. 'You look dead-beat already; your eyes will get tired. Trust the bell here, over the door. Brass and steel don't get tired; brass and steel don't fall asleep; brass and steel will ring, and call you to her. Take a rest and a drink.'

These words reminded Jack of the doctor's experiment with the alarm-bell. He could not disguise from himself the stealthily-growing sense of fatigue in his head and his limbs. 'I'm afraid you're

right,' he said sadly. 'I wish I was a stronger man.' He joined Schwartz at the table, and dropped wearily into the watchman's chair.

His head sank on his breast, his eyes closed. He started up again. 'She may want help when she wakes!' he cried, with a look of terror. 'What must we do? Can we carry her home between us? Oh! Schwartz, I was so confident in myself a little while since—and it seems all to have left me now!'

'Don't worry that weary little head of yours about nothing,' Schwartz answered, with rough good-nature. 'Come along with me, and I'll show you where help's to be got when help's wanted. No! no! you won't be out of hearing of the bell—if it rings.

We'll leave the door open. It's only on the other side of the passage here.'

He lighted a lantern, and led Jack out.

Leaving the courtyard and the waiting-room on their left hand, he advanced along the right-hand side of the passage, and opened the door of a bed-chamber, always kept ready for use. A second door in the bed-chamber led to a bath-room. Here, opposite the bath, stood the cabinet in which the restorative applications were kept, under the care of the overseer.

When the two men had gone out, Madame Fontaine ventured into the Watchman's Chamber. Her eyes turned towards the one terrible cell, at the farther end of the row of black curtains. She advanced towards

it; and stopped, lifting her hands to her head in the desperate effort to compose herself.

The terror of impending discovery had never left her, since Jack had owned the use to which he had put the contents of the blue-glass bottle.

Animated by that all-mastering dread, she had thrown away every poison in the medicine-chest—had broken the bottles into fragments—and had taken those fragments out with her, when she left the house to follow Doctor Dormann. On the way to the cemetery, she had scattered the morsels of broken glass and torn paper on the dark road outside the city gate. Nothing now remained but the empty medicine-chest, and the writing in cypher, once rolled round the poison called the 'Looking-Glass Drops.'

Under these altered circumstances, she had risked asking Doctor Dormann to interpret the mysterious characters, on the bare chance of their containing some warning by which she might profit, in her present ignorance of the results which Jack's ignorant interference might produce.

Acting under the same vague terror of that possible revival, to which Jack looked forward with such certain hope, she had followed him to the Deadhouse, and had waited, hidden in the cells, to hear what dangerous confidences he might repose in the doctor or in Mr. Keller, and to combat on the spot the suspicion which he might ignorantly rouse in their minds. Still in the same agony of doubt, she now stood, with her eyes on the cell, trying to summon the

resolution to judge for herself. One look at the dead woman, while the solitude in the room gave her the chance—one look might assure her of the livid pallor of death, or warn her of the terrible possibilities of awakening life. She hurried headlong over the intervening space, and looked in.

There, grand and still, lay her murderous work! There, ghostly white on the ground of the black robe, were the rigid hands, topped by the hideous machinery which was to betray them, if they trembled under the mysterious return of life!

In the instant when she saw it, the sight overwhelmed her with horror. She turned distractedly, and fled through the open door She crossed the courtyard, like a deeper

shadow creeping swiftly through the darkness of the winter night. On the threshold of the solitary waiting-room, exhausted nature claimed its rest. She wavered—groped with her hands at the empty air—and sank insensible on the floor.

In the meantime, Schwartz revealed the purpose of his visit to the bath-room.

The glass doors which protected the upper division of the cabinet were locked; the key being in the possession of the overseer. The cupboard in the lower division, containing towels and flannel wrappers, was left unsecured. Opening the door, the watchman drew out a bottle and an old travelling flask, concealed behind the bath-linen. 'I call this my cellar,' he explained.

'Cheer up, Jacky; we'll have a jolly night of it yet.'

'I don't want to see your cellar!' said Jack impatiently. 'I want to be of use to Mistress—show me the place where we call for help.'

'Call?' repeated Schwartz, with a roar of laughter. 'Do you think they can hear us at the overseer's, through a courtyard, and a waiting-room, and a grand hall, and another courtyard, and another waiting-room beyond? Not if we were twenty men all bawling together till we were hoarse! I'll show you how we can make the master hear us—if that miraculous revival of yours happens,' he added facetiously in a whisper to himself.

He led the way back into the passage,

and held up his lantern so as to show the cornice. A row of fire-buckets was suspended there by hooks. Midway between them, a stout rope hung through a metal-lined hole in the roof.

'Do you see that?' said Schwartz. 'You have only to pull, and there's an iron tongue in the belfry above that will speak loud enough to be heard at the city gate. The overseer will come tumbling in, with his bunch of keys, as if the devil was at his heels, and the two women-servants after him—old and ugly, Jack!—they attend to the bath, you know, when a woman wants it. Wait a bit! Take the light into the bedroom, and get a chair for yourself—we haven't much accommodation for evening visitors. Got it? that's right. Would you

like to see where the mad watchman hung himself? On the last hook at the end of the row there. We've got a song he made about the Deadhouse. I think it's in the drawer of the table. A gentleman had it printed and sold, for the benefit of the widow and children. Wait till we are well warmed with our liquor, and I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll sing you the mad watchman's song; and Jacky, my man, you shall sing the chorus! Tow-row-rub-a-dub-boom—that's the tune. Pretty, isn't it? Come along back to our snuggery.' He led the way to the Watchman's Chamber.

CHAPTER XIX.

JACK looked eagerly into the cell again There was no change—not a sign of that happy waking in which he so firmly believed.

Schwartz opened the drawer of the table. Tobacco and pipes; two or three small drinking-glasses; a dirty pack of playing-cards; the mad watchman's song, with a woodcut illustration of the suicide—all lay huddled together. He took from the drawer the song, and two of the drinking-glasses, and called to his little guest to come out of the cell.

'There;' he said, filling the glasses. 'you never tasted such wine as that in all your life. Off with it!'

Jack turned away with a look of disgust. 'What did you say of wine, when I drank with you the other night?' he asked reproachfully. 'You said it would warm my heart, and make a man of me. And what did it do? I couldn't stand on my legs. I couldn't hold up my head—I was so sleepy and stupid that Joseph had to take me upstairs to bed. I hate your wine! Your wine's a liar, who promises and doesn't perform! I'm weary enough, and wretched enough in my mind, as it is. No more wine for me!'

'Wrong!' remarked Schwartz, emptying his glass, and smacking his lips after it.

'You made a serious mistake the other night—you didn't drink half enough. Give the good liquor a fair chance, my son. No, you won't? Must I try a little gentle persuasion before you will come back to your chair?' Suiting the action to the word, he put his arm round Jack. 'What's this I feel under my hand?' he asked. 'A bottle?' He took it out of Jack's breast-pocket. 'Lord help us!' he exclaimed; 'it looks like physic!'

Jack snatched it away from him, with a cry of delight. 'The very thing for me—and I never thought of it!'

It was the phial which Madame Fontaine had repentantly kept to herself, after having expressly filled it for him with the fatal dose of 'Alexander's Wine'—the phial

which he had found, when he first opened the 'Pink-Room Cupboard.' In the astonishment and delight of finding the blue-glass bottle immediately afterwards, he had entirely forgotten it. Nothing had since happened to remind him that it was in his pocket, until Schwartz had stumbled on the discovery.

'It cures you when you are tired or troubled in your mind,' Jack announced in his grandest manner, repeating Madame Fontaine's own words. 'Is there any water here?'

'Not a drop, thank Heaven!' said Schwartz, devoutly.

'Give me my glass, then. I once tried the remedy by itself, and it stung me as it went down. The wine won't hurt me,

with this splendid stuff in it. I'll take it in the wine.'

'Who told you to take it?' Schwartz asked, holding back the glass.

'Mrs. Housekeeper told me.'

'A woman!' growled Schwartz, in a tone of sovereign contempt. 'How dare you let a woman physic you, when you've got me for a doctor? Jack! I'm ashamed of you.'

Jack defended his manhood. 'Oh, I don't care what *she* says! I despise her—she's mad. You don't suppose she made this? I wouldn't touch it, if she had. No, no; her husband made it—a wonderful man! the greatest man in Germany!'

He reached across the table and secured his glass of wine. Before it was possible to

interfere, he had emptied the contents of the phial into it, and had raised it to his lips. At that moment, Schwartz's restraining hand found its way to his wrist. The deputy watchman had far too sincere a regard for good wine to permit it to be drunk, in combination with physic, at his own table.

'Put it down!' he said gruffly. 'You're my visitor, ain't you? Do you think I'm going to let housekeeper's cat-lap be drunk at my table? Look here!'

He held up his travelling-flask, with the metal drinking-cup taken off, so as to show the liquor through the glass. The rich amber colour of it fascinated Jack. He put his wine-glass back on the table. 'What is it?' he asked eagerly.

'Drinkable gold, Jack! *My* physic. Brandy!'

He poured out a dram into the metal cup. 'Try that,' he said, 'and don't let me hear any more about the housekeeper's physic.'

Jack tasted it. The water came into his eyes—he put his hands on his throat. 'Fire!' he gasped faintly.

'Wait!' said Schwartz.

Jack waited. The fiery grip of the brandy relaxed; the genial warmth of it was wafted through him persuasively from head to foot. He took another sip. His eyes began to glitter. 'What divine being made this?' he asked. Without waiting to be answered, he tried it again, and emptied the cup. 'More!' he cried. 'I never felt

so big, I never felt so strong, I never felt so clever, as I feel now!'

Schwartz, drinking freely from his own bottle, recovered, and more than recovered, his Bacchanalian good humour. He clapped Jack on the shoulder. 'Who's the right doctor now?' he asked cheerfully. 'A drab of a housekeeper? or Father Schwartz? Your health, my jolly boy! When the bottle's empty, I'll help you to finish the flask. Drink away! and the devil take all heel-taps!'

The next dose of brandy fired Jack's excitable brain with a new idea. He fell on his knees at the table, and clasped his hands in a sudden fervour of devotion. 'Silence!' he commanded sternly. 'Your wine's only a poor devil. Your drinkable gold is a god.

Take your cap off, Schwartz—I'm worshipping drinkable gold!'

Schwartz, highly diverted, threw his cap up to the ceiling. 'Drinkable gold, ora pro nobis!' he shouted, profanely adapting himself to Jack's humour. 'You shall be Pope, my boy—and I'll be the Pope's butler. Allow me to help your sacred majesty back to your chair.'

Jack's answer betrayed another change in him. His tones were lofty; his manner was distant. 'I prefer the floor,' he said; 'hand me down my mug.' As he reached up to take it, the alarm bell over the door caught his eye. Debased as he was by the fiery strength of the drink, his ineradicable love for his mistress made its noble influence felt through the coarse fumes that

were mounting to his brain. 'Stop!' he cried. 'I must be where I can see the bell —I must be ready for her, the instant it rings.'

He crawled across the floor, and seated himself with his back against the wall of one of the empty cells, on the left-hand side ot the room. Schwartz, shaking his fat sides with laughter, handed down the cup to his guest. Jack took no notice of it. His eyes, reddened already by the brandy, were fixed on the bell opposite to him. 'I want to know about it,' he said. 'What's that steel thing there, under the brass cover?'

'What's the use of asking?' Schwartz replied, returning to his bottle.

'I want to know!'

'Patience, Jack—patience. Follow my

fore-finger. My hand seems to shake a little; but it's as honest a hand as ever was. That steel thing there, is the bell hammer, you know. And, bless your heart, the hammer's everything. Cost, Lord knows how much. Another toast, my son, Good luck to the bell!'

Jack changed again; he began to cry. 'She's sleeping too long on that sofa, in there,' he said sadly. 'I want her to speak to me; I want to hear her scold me for drinking in this horrid place. My heart's all cold again. Where's the mug?' He found it, as he spoke; the fire of the brandy went down his throat once more, and lashed him into frantic high spirits. 'I'm up in the clouds!' he shouted; 'I'm riding on a whirlwind. Sing, Schwartz! Ha! there are the stars

twinkling through the skylight! Sing the stars down from heaven!'

Schwartz emptied his bottle, without the ceremony of using the glass. 'Now we are primed!' he said—'now for the mad watchman's song!' He snatched up the paper from the table, and roared out hoarsely the first verse:

> The moon was shining, cold and bright,
> In the Frankfort Deadhouse, on New Year's night
> And I was the watchman, left alone,
> While the rest to feast and dance were gone;
> I envied their lot, and cursed my own—
> Poor me!

'Chorus, Jack! "I envied their lot and cursed my own"——'

The last words of the verse were lost in a yell of drunken terror. Schwartz started out of his chair, and pointed, panic-stricken, to the lower end of the room. 'A ghost!'

he screamed. 'A ghost in black, at the door!'

Jack looked round, and burst out laughing. 'Sit down again, you old fool,' he said. 'It's only Mrs. Housekeeper. We are singing, Mrs. Housekeeper! You haven't heard my voice yet—I'm the finest singer in Germany.'

Madame Fontaine approached him humbly. 'You have a kind heart, Jack—I am sure you will help me,' she said. 'Show me how to get out of this frightful place.'

'The devil take you!' growled Schwartz, recovering himself. 'How did you get in?'

'She's a witch!' shouted Jack. 'She rode in on a broomstick—she crept in

through the keyhole. Where's the fire? Let's take her downstairs, and burn her!'

Schwartz applied himself to the brandy-flask, and began to laugh again. 'There never was such good company as Jack,' he said, in his oiliest tones. 'You can't get out to-night, Mrs. Witch. The gates are locked —and they don't trust me with the key. Walk in, ma'am. Plenty of accommodation for you, on that side of the room where Jack sits. We are slack of guests for the grave, to-night. Walk in.'

She renewed her entreaties. 'I'll give you all the money I have about me! Who can I go to for the key? Jack! Jack! speak for me!'

'Go on with the song!' cried Jack.

She appealed again in her despair to

Schwartz. 'Oh, sir, have mercy on me! I fainted, out there—and, when I came to myself, I tried to open the gates—and I called, and called, and nobody heard me.'

Schwartz's sense of humour was tickled by this. 'If you could bellow like a bull,' he said, 'nobody would hear you. Take a seat, ma'am.'

'Go on with the song!' Jack reiterated. 'I'm tired of waiting.'

Madame Fontaine looked wildly from one to the other of them. 'Oh, God, I'm locked in with an idiot and a drunkard!' The thought of it maddened her as it crossed her mind. Once more, she fled from the room. Again, and again, in the outer darkness, she shrieked for help.

Schwartz advanced staggering towards

the door, with Jack's empty chair in his hand. 'Perhaps you'll be able to pipe a little higher, ma'am, if you come back, and sit down? Now for the song, Jack!'

He burst out with the second verse:

> Backwards and forwards, with silent tread,
> I walked on my watch by the doors of the dead,
> And I said, It's hard, on this New Year,
> While the rest are dancing to leave me here,
> Alone with death and cold and fear—
> Poor me!

'Chorus, Jack! Chorus, Mrs. Housekeeper! Ho! ho! look at her! She can't resist the music—she has come back to us already. What can we do for you, ma'am? The flask's not quite drained yet. Come and have a drink.'

She had returned, recoiling from the outer darkness and silence, giddy with the sickening sense of faintness which was creep-

ing over her again. When Schwartz spoke she advanced with tottering steps. 'Water!' she exclaimed, gasping for breath. 'I'm faint—water! water!'

'Not a drop in the place, ma'am! Brandy, if you like?'

'I forbid it!' cried Jack, with a peremptory sign of the hand. 'Drinkable gold is for us—not for her!'

The glass of wine which Schwartz had prevented him from drinking caught his notice. To give Madame Fontaine her own 'remedy,' stolen from her own room, was just the sort of trick to please Jack in his present humour. He pointed to the glass, and winked at the watchman. After a momentary hesitation, Schwartz's muddled brain absorbed the new idea. 'Here's a

drop of wine left, ma'am,' he said. 'Suppose you try it?'

She leaned one hand on the table to support herself. Her heart sank lower and lower; a cold perspiration bedewed her face. 'Quick! quick!' she murmured faintly. She seized the glass, and emptied it eagerly to the last drop

Schwartz and Jack eyed her with malicious curiosity The idea of getting away was still in her mind. 'I think I can walk now,' she said. 'For God's sake, let me out!'

'Haven't I told you already? I can't get out myself.'

At that brutal answer, she shrank back. Slowly and feebly she made her way to the chair, and dropped on it.

'Cheer up, ma'am!' said Schwartz. 'You shall have more music to help you—you shall hear how the mad watchman lost his wits. Another drop of the drinkable gold, Jack. A dram for you and a dram for me—and here goes!' He roared out the last verses of the song:—

Any company's better than none, I said:
If I can't have the living, I'd like the dead.
In one terrific moment more,
The corpse-bell rang at each cell door,
The moonlight shivered on the floor—
Poor me!

The curtains gaped; there stood a ghost,
On every threshold, as white as frost,
You called us, they shrieked, and we gathered soon;
Dance with your guests by the New Year's moon!
I danced till I dropped in a deadly swoon—
Poor me!

And since that night I've lost my wits,
And I shake with ceaseless ague-fits:
For the ghosts they turned me cold as stone,
On that New Year's night when the white moon shone,
And I walked on my watch, all, all alone—
Poor me!

And, oh, when I lie in my coffin-bed,
Heap thick the earth above my head!
Or I shall come back, and dance once more,
With frantic feet on the Deadhouse floor,
And a ghost for a partner at every door—
Poor me!

The night had cleared. While Schwartz was singing, the moon shone in at the sky-light. At the last verse of the song, a ray of the cold yellow light streamed across Jack's face. The fire of the brandy leapt into flame—the madness broke out in him, with a burst of its by-gone fury. He sprang, screaming, to his feet.

'The moon!' he shouted—'the mad watchman's moon! The mad watchman himself is coming back. There he is, sliding down on the slanting light! Do you see the brown earth of the grave dropping from

him, and the rope round his neck? Ha! how he skips, and twists, and twirls! He's dancing again with the dead ones. Make way there! I mean to dance with them too. Come on, mad watchman—come on! I'm as mad as you are!'

He whirled round and round with the fancied ghost for a partner in the dance. The coarse laughter of Schwartz burst out again at the terrible sight. He called, with drunken triumph, to Madame Fontaine. 'Look at Jacky, ma'am. There's a dancer for you! There's good company for a dull winter night!' She neither looked nor moved—she sat crouched on the chair, spell-bound with terror. Jack threw up his arms, turned giddily once or twice, and sank exhausted on the floor. 'The cold of him

creeps up my hands,' he said, still possessed by the vision of the watchman. 'He cools my eyes, he calms my heart, he stuns my head. I'm dying, dying, dying—going back with him to the grave. Poor me! poor me!'

He lay hushed in a strange repose; his eyes wide open, staring up at the moon. Schwartz drained the last drop of brandy out of the flask. 'Jack's name ought to be Solomon,' he pronounced with drowsy solemnity; 'Solomon was wise; and Jack's wise. Jack goes to sleep, when the liquor's done. Take away the bottle, before the overseer comes in. If any man says I am not sober, that man lies. The Rhine wine has a way of humming in one's head. That's all, Mr. Overseer—that's all. Do I see the

sun rising, up there in the skylight? I wish you good-night; I wish—you—good—night.'

He laid his heavy arms on the table; his head dropped on them—he slept.

The time passed. No sound broke the silence but the lumpish snoring of Schwartz. No change appeared in Jack; there he lay, staring up at the moon.

Somewhere in the building (unheard thus far in the uproar) a clock struck the first hour of the morning.

Madame Fontaine started. The sound shook her with a new fear—a fear that expressed itself in a furtive look at the cell in which the dead woman lay. If the corpse-bell rang, would the stroke of it be like the single stroke of the clock?

'Jack!' she whispered. 'Do you hear the clock? Oh, Jack, the stillness is dreadful—speak to me.'

He slowly raised himself. Perhaps the striking of the clock—perhaps some inner prompting—had roused him. He neither answered Madame Fontaine, nor looked at her. With his arms clasped round his knees, he sat on the floor in the attitude of a savage. His eyes, which had stared at the moon, now stared with the same rigid, glassy look at the alarm-bell over the cell-door.

The time went on. Again the oppression of silence became more than Madame Fontaine could endure. Again she tried to make Jack speak to her.

'What are you looking at?' she asked.

'What are you waiting for? Is it——?' The rest of the sentence died away on her lips: the words that would finish it were words too terrible to be spoken.

The sound of her voice produced no visible impression on Jack. Had it influenced him, in some unseen way? Something did certainly disturb the strange torpor that held him. He spoke. The tones were slow and mechanical—the tones of a man searching his memory with pain and difficulty; repeating his recollections, one by one, as he recovered them, to himself.

'When she moves,' he muttered, 'her hands pull the string. Her hands send a message up: up and up to the bell.' He paused, and pointed to the cell-door.

The action had a horrible suggestiveness

to the guilty wretch who was watching him.

'Don't do that!' she cried. 'Don't point *there!*'

His hand never moved; he pursued his newly-found recollections of what the doctor had shown to him.

'Up and up to the bell,' he repeated. 'And the bell feels it. The steel thing moves. The bell speaks. Good bell! Faithful bell!'

The clock struck the half-hour past one. Madame Fontaine shrieked at the sound—her senses knew no distinction between the clock and the bell.

She saw his pointing hand drop back, and clasp itself with the other hand, round his knees. He spoke—softly and tenderly

now—he was speaking to the dead. 'Rise Mistress, rise! Dear soul, the time is long; and poor Jack is waiting for you!'

She thought the closed curtains moved: the delusion was reality to her. She tried to rouse Schwartz.

'Watchman! watchman! Wake up!'

He slept on as heavily as ever.

She half rose from her chair. She was almost on her feet—when she sank back again. Jack had moved. He got up on his knees. 'Mistress hears me!' he said. The light of vivid expression showed itself in his eyes. Their vacancy was gone: they looked longingly at the door of the cell. He got on his feet—he pressed both hands over his bosom. 'Come!' he said. 'Oh, Mistress, come!'

There was a sound—a faint premonitory rustling sound—over the door.

The steel hammer moved—rose—struck the metal globe. The bell rang.

He stood rooted to the floor, sobbing hysterically. The iron grasp of suspense held him.

Not a cry, not a movement escaped Madame Fontaine. The life seemed to have been struck out of her by the stroke of the bell. It woke Schwartz. Except that he looked up, he too never moved: he too was like a living creature turned to stone.

A minute passed.

The curtains swayed gently. Tremulous fingers crept out, parting them. Slowly, over the black surface of the curtain, a fair naked arm showed itself, widening the gap.

The figure appeared, in its velvet pall. On the pale face the stillness of repose was barely ruffled yet. The eyes alone were conscious of returning life. They looked out on the room, softly surprised and perplexed —no more. They looked downwards: the lips trembled sweetly into a smile. She saw Jack, kneeling in ecstasy at her feet.

And now again, there was stillness in the room. Unutterable happiness rejoiced, unutterable dread suffered, in the same silence.

The first sound heard came suddenly from the lonely outer hall. Hurrying footsteps swept over the courtyard. The flash of lights flew along the dark passage. Voices of men and women, mingled together, poured into the Watchman's Chamber.

POSTSCRIPT.

MR. DAVID GLENNEY RETURNS TO FRANKFORT, AND CLOSES THE STORY.

I.

On the twelfth of December, I received a letter from Mrs. Wagner, informing me that the marriage of Fritz and Minna had been deferred until the thirteenth of January. Shortly afterwards I left London, on my way to Frankfort.

My departure was hurried, to afford me time to transact business with some of our correspondents in France and in Northern Germany. Our head-clerk, Mr. Hartrey (directing the London house in Mrs. Wagner's absence), had his own old-fashioned notions of doing nothing in a hurry. He insisted on

allowing me a far larger margin of time, for treating with our correspondents, than I was likely to require. The good man little suspected to what motive my ready submission to him was due. I was eager to see my aunt and the charming Minna once more. Without neglecting any of my duties (and with the occasional sacrifice of travelling by night), I contrived to reach Frankfort a week before I was expected—that is to say, in the forenoon of the fourth of January.

II.

Joseph's face, when he opened the door, at once informed me that something extraordinary was going on in the house.

'Anything wrong?' I asked.

Joseph looked at me in a state of bewilderment. 'You had better speak to the doctor,' he said.

'The doctor! Who is ill? My aunt? Mr. Keller? Who is it?' In my impatience, I took him by the collar of his coat, and shook him. I shook out nothing but the former answer, a little abridged :—

'Speak to the doctor.'

The office-door was close by me. I asked one of the clerks if Mr. Keller was in his room. The clerk informed me that Mr. Keller was upstairs with the doctor. In the extremity of my suspense, I inquired again if my aunt was ill. The man opened his eyes. 'Is it possible you haven't heard?' he said.

'Is she dead or alive?' I burst out, losing all patience.

'Both,' answered the clerk.

I began—not unnaturally, I think—to wonder whether I was in Mr. Keller's house, or in an asylum for idiots. Returning to the hall, I collared Joseph for the second time. 'Take me up to the doctor instantly!' I said.

Joseph led the way upstairs—not on my

aunt's side of the house, to my infinite relief. On the first landing, he made a mysterious communication. 'Mr. David, I have given notice to leave,' he said. 'There are some things that no servant can put up with. While a person lives, I expect a person to live. When a person dies, I expect a person to die. There must be no confusion on such a serious subject as life and death. I blame nobody—I understand nothing—I merely go. Follow me, if you please, sir.'

Had he been drinking? He led the way up the next flight of stairs, steadily and quietly. He knocked discreetly at Madame Fontaine's door. 'Mr. David Glenney,' he announced, 'to see Doctor Dormann.'

Mr. Keller came out first, closing the door behind him. He embraced me, with a

Mr Kell

Mr Glenney

In the drawing-room, he wrote a few lines rapidly. 'See us sign our names,' he said. He handed the pen to Mr. Keller after he had signed himself—and then gave me the paper to read.

To my unspeakable amazement, the writing certified that, 'the suspended vital forces in Mrs. Wagner had recovered their action, in the Deadhouse of Frankfort, at half-past one o'clock on the morning of the fourth of January; that he had professionally superintended the restoration to life; and that he thereby relieved the magistrates from any further necessity for pursuing a private inquiry, the motive for which no longer existed.' To this statement there was a line added, declaring that Mr. Keller withdrew his application to the

magistrates; authenticated by Mr. Keller's signature.

I stood with the paper in my hand, looking from one to the other of them, as completely bewildered as Joseph himself.

'I can't leave Madame Fontaine,' said the doctor; 'I am professionally interested in watching the case. Otherwise, I would have made my statement in person. Mr. Keller has been terribly shaken, and stands in urgent need of rest and quiet. You will do us both a service if you will take that paper to the town-hall, and declare before the magistrates that you know us personally, and have seen us sign our names. On your return, you shall have every explanation that I can give; and you shall see for yourself

that you need feel no uneasiness on the subject of your aunt.'

Having arrived at the town-hall, I made the personal statement to which the doctor had referred. Among the questions put to me, I was asked if I had any direct interest in the matter—either as regarded Mrs. Wagner or any other person. Having answered that I was Mrs. Wagner's nephew, I was instructed to declare in writing, that I approved (as Mrs. Wagner's representative) of the doctor's statement and of Mr. Keller's withdrawal of his application.

With this, the formal proceedings terminated, and I was free to return to the house.

III.

Joseph had his orders, this time. He spoke like a reasonable being—he said the doctor was waiting for me, in Madame Fontaine's room. The place of the appointment rather surprised me.

The doctor opened the door—but paused before he admitted me.

'I think you were the first person,' he said, 'who saw Mr. Keller, on the morning when he was taken ill?'

'After the late Mr. Engelman,' I answered, 'I was the first person.'

'Come in, then. I want you to look at Madame Fontaine.'

He led me to the bedside. The instant I looked at her, I saw Mr. Keller's illness reproduced, in every symptom. There she lay, in the same apathy; with the same wan look on her face, and the same intermittent trembling of her hands. When I recovered the first shock of the discovery, I was able to notice poor Minna, kneeling at the opposite side of the bed, weeping bitterly. 'Oh, my dear one!' she cried, in a passion of grief, 'look at me! speak to me!'

The mother opened her eyes for a moment—looked at Minna—and closed them again wearily. 'Leave me quiet,' she said, in tones of fretful entreaty. Minna rose and bent over the pillow tenderly. 'Your poor

lips look so parched,' she said; 'let me give you some lemonade?' Madame Fontaine only repeated the words, 'Leave me quiet.' The same reluctance to raise her heavy eyelids, the same entreaty to be left undisturbed, which had alarmed me on the memorable morning when I had entered Mr. Keller's room!

Doctor Dormann signed to me to follow him out. As he opened the door, the nurse inquired if he had any further instructions for her. 'Send for me, the moment you see a change,' he answered; 'I shall be in the drawing-room, with Mr. Glenney.' I silently pressed poor Minna's hand, before I left her. Who could have presumed, at that moment, to express sympathy in words?

The doctor and I descended the stairs

together. 'Does her illness remind you of anything?' he asked.

'Of Mr. Keller's illness,' I answered, 'exactly as I remember it.'

He made no further remark. We entered the drawing-room. I inquired if I could see my aunt.

'You must wait a little,' he said. 'Mrs. Wagner is asleep. The longer she sleeps the more complete her recovery will be. My main anxiety is about Jack. He is quiet enough now, keeping watch outside her door; but he has given me some trouble. I wish I knew more of his early history. From all I can learn, he was only what is called "half-witted," when they received him at the asylum in London. The cruel repressive treatment in that place

aggravated his imbecility into violent madness—and such madness has a tendency to recur. Mrs. Wagner's influence, which has already done so much, is my main hope for the future. Sit down, and let me explain the strange position in which you find us here, as well as I can.'

IV.

'Do you remember how Mr. Keller's illness was cured?' the doctor began.

Those words instantly reminded me, not only of Doctor Dormann's mysterious suspicions at the time of the illness, but of Jack's extraordinary question to me, on the morning when I left Frankfort. The doctor saw that I answered him with some little embarrassment.

'Let us open our minds to each other, without reserve,' he said. 'I have set you thinking of something. What is it?'

I replied, concealing nothing. Doctor

Dormann was equally candid on his side. He spoke to me, exactly as he is reported to have spoken to Mr. Keller, in the Second Part of this narrative.

'You now know,' he proceeded, 'what I thought of Mr. Keller's extraordinary recovery, and what I feared when I found Mrs. Wagner (as I then firmly believed) dead. My suspicions of poisoning pointed to the poisoner. Madame Fontaine's wonderful cure of Mr. Keller, by means of her own mysterious remedy, made me suspect Madame Fontaine. My motive, in refusing to give the burial certificate, was to provoke the legal inquiry, which I knew that Mr. Keller would institute, on the mere expression of a doubt, on my part, whether your aunt had died a natural death. At that time, I

had not the slightest anticipation of the event that has actually occurred. Before, however, we had removed the remains to the Dead-house, I must own I was a little startled—prepare yourself for a surprise—by a private communication, addressed to me by Jack.'

He repeated Jack's narrative of the opening of the Pink-Room cupboard, and the administration of the antidote to Mrs. Wagner.

'You will understand,' he went on, 'that I was too well aware of the marked difference between Mr. Keller's illness and Mrs. Wagner's illness to suppose for a moment that the same poison had been given to both of them. I was, therefore, far from sharing Jack's blind confidence in the efficacy of the blue-glass bottle, in the case of his mistress.

But I tell you, honestly, my mind was disturbed about it. Towards night, my thoughts were again directed to the subject, under mysterious circumstances. Mr. Keller and I accompanied the hearse to the Deadhouse. On our way through the streets, I was followed and stopped by Madame Fontaine. She had something to give me. Here it is.'

He laid on the table a sheet of thick paper, closely covered with writing in cypher.

V.

'Whose writing is this?' I asked.

'The writing of Madame Fontaine's late husband.'

'And she put it into your hands!'

'Yes—and asked me to interpret the cypher for her.'

'It's simply incomprehensible.'

'Not in the least. She knew the use to which Jack had put her antidote, and (in her ignorance of chemistry) she was eager to be prepared for any consequences which might follow. Can you guess on what

chance I calculated, when I consented to interpret the cypher?'

'On the chance that it might tell you what poison she had given to Mrs. Wagner?'

'Well guessed, Mr. Glenney!'

'And you have actually discovered the meaning of these hieroglyphics?'

He laid a second sheet of paper on the table.

'There is but one cypher that defies interpretation,' he said. 'If you and your correspondent privately arrange to consult the same edition of the same book, and if your cypher, or his, refers to a given page and to certain lines on that page, no ingenuity can discover you, unaided by a previous discovery of the book. All other cyphers, so far as I know, are at the mercy of skill and patience. In this case, I began

(to save time and trouble) by trying the rule for interpreting the most simple, and most elementary, of all cyphers—that is to say, the use of the ordinary language of correspondence, concealed under arbitrary signs. The right way to read these signs can be described in two words. On examination of the cypher, you will find that some signs will be more often repeated than others. Count the separate signs, and ascertain, by simple addition, which especial sign occurs oftenest—which follows next in point of number—and so on. These comparisons established, ask yourself what vowel occurs oftenest, and what consonant occurs oftenest, in the language in which you suppose the cypher to be written. The result is merely a question of time and patience.'

'And this is the result?' I said, pointing to the second sheet of paper.

'Read it,' he answered; 'and judge for yourself.'

The opening sentence of the interpreted cypher appeared to be intended by Doctor Fontaine to serve the purpose of a memorandum; repeating privately the instructions already attached by labels to the poison called 'Alexander's Wine,' and to its antidote.

The paragraphs that followed were of a far more interesting kind. They alluded to the second poison, called 'The Looking-Glass Drops;' and they related the result of one of the Professor's most remarkable experiments in the following words:—

VI.

'The Looking Glass Drops. Fatal Dose, as discovered by experiments on animals, the same as in the case of Alexander's Wine. But the effect, in producing death, more rapid, and more indistinguishable, in respect of presenting traces on post-mortem examination.

'After many patient trials, I can discover no trustworthy antidote to this infernal poison. Under these circumstances, I dare not attempt to modify it for medical use. I would throw it away—but I don't like to be beaten. If I live a little longer, I will try once

more, with my mind refreshed by other studies.

'A month after writing these lines (which I have repeated in plain characters, on the bottle, for fear of accidents), I tried again—and failed again. Annoyed by this new disappointment, I did something unworthy of me as a scientific man.

'After first poisoning an animal with the Looking-Glass Drops, I administered a dose from the blue bottle, containing the antidote to Alexander's Wine—knowing perfectly well the different nature of the two poisons; expecting nothing of any scientific importance to follow; and yet trusting stupidly to chance to help me.

'The result was startling in the last degree. It was nothing less than the complete

suspension of all the signs of life (as we know them) for a day, and a night, and part of another day. I only knew that the animal was not really dead, by observing, on the morning of the second day, that no signs of decomposition had set in—the season being summer, and the laboratory badly ventilated.

'An hour after the first symptoms of revival had astonished me, the creature was as lively again as usual, and ate with a good appetite. After a lapse of ten days, it is still in perfect health. This extraordinary example of the action and reaction of the ingredients of the poison and the ingredients of the antidote on each other, and on the sources of life, deserves, and shall have, the most careful investigation. May I live to

carry the inquiry through to some good use, and to record it on another page!'

There was no other page, and no further record. The Professor's last scientific aspiration had not been fulfilled.

VII.

'It was past midnight,' said the doctor, 'when I made the discovery, with which you are now acquainted. I went at once to Mr. Keller. He had fortunately not gone to bed; and he accompanied me to the Deadhouse. Knowing the overseer's private door, at the side of the building, I was able to rouse him with very little delay. In the excitement that possessed me, I spoke of the revival as a possible thing in the hearing of the servants. The whole household accompanied us to the Deadhouse, at the opposite extremity of the building. What we saw there,

I am utterly incapable of describing to you. I was in time to take the necessary measures for keeping Mrs. Wagner composed, and for removing her without injury to Mr. Keller's house. Having successfully accomplished this, I presumed that my anxieties were at an end. I was completely mistaken.'

'You refer to Madame Fontaine, I suppose?'

'No; I refer to Jack. The poor wretch's ignorant faith had unquestionably saved his mistress's life. I should never have ventured (even if I had been acquainted with the result of the Professor's experiment, at an earlier hour) to run the desperate risk, which Jack confronted without hesitation. The events of the night (aggravated by the brandy that Schwartz had given to him)

had completely overthrown the balance of his feeble brain. He was as mad, for the time being, as ever he could have been in Bedlam. With some difficulty, I prevailed on him to take a composing mixture. He objected irritably to trust me; and, even when the mixture had begun to quiet him, he was ungrateful enough to speak contemptuously of what I had done for him. "I had a much better remedy than yours," he said, "made by a man who was worth a hundred of you. Schwartz and I were fools enough to give it to Mrs. Housekeeper, last night." I thought nothing of this—it was one of the eccentricities which were to be expected from him, in his condition. I left him quietly asleep; and I was about to go home, and get a little rest myself—when Mr.

Keller's son stopped me in the hall. "Do go and see Madame Fontaine," he said; "Minna is alarmed about her mother." I went upstairs again directly.'

'Had you noticed anything remarkable in Madame Fontaine,' I asked, 'before Fritz spoke to you?'

'I noticed, at the Deadhouse, that she looked frightened out of her senses; and I was a little surprised—holding the opinion I did of her—that such a woman should show so much sensibility. Mr. Keller took charge of her, on our way back to the house. I was quite unprepared for what I saw afterwards, when I went to her room at Fritz's request.'

'Did you discover the resemblance to Mr. Keller's illness?'

'No—not till afterwards. She sent her daughter out of the room; and I thought she looked at me strangely, when we were alone. "I want the paper that I gave you in the street, last night," she said. I asked her why she wanted it. She seemed not to know how to reply; she became excited and confused. "To destroy it, to be sure!" she burst out suddenly. "Every bottle my husband left is destroyed—strewed here, there, and everywhere, from the Gate to the Deadhouse. Oh, I know what you think of me—I defy you!" She seemed to forget what she had said, the moment she had said it—she turned away, and opened a drawer, and took out a book closed by metal clasps. My presence in the room appeared to be a lost perception in her

mind. The clasps of the book, as well as I could make it out, opened by touching some spring. I noticed that her hands trembled as they tried to find the spring. I attributed the trembling to the terrors of the night, and offered to help her. "Let my secrets alone," she said—and pushed the book under the pillow of her bed. It was my professional duty to assist her, if I could. Though I attached no sort of importance to what Jack had said, I thought it desirable, before I prescribed for her, to discover whether she had really taken some medicine of her own or not. She staggered back from me, on my repeating what I had heard from Jack, as if I had terrified her. "What remedy does he mean? I drank nothing but a glass of wine. Send for him

directly—I must, and will speak to him!" I told her this was impossible; I could not permit his sleep to be disturbed. "The watchman!" she cried; "the drunken brute! send for him." By this time I began to conclude that there was really something wrong. I called in her daughter to look after her while I was away, and then left the room to consult with Fritz. The only hope of finding Schwartz (the night-watch at the Deadhouse being over by that time) was to apply to his sister the nurse. I knew where she lived; and Fritz most kindly offered to go to her. By the time Schwartz was found, and brought to the house, Madame Fontaine was just able to understand what he said, and no more. I began to recognise the symptoms of Mr.

Keller's illness. The apathy which you remember was showing itself already. "Leave me to die," she said quietly; "I deserve it." The last effort of the distracted mind, rousing for a moment the sinking body, was made almost immediately afterwards. She raised herself on the pillow, and seized my arm. "Mind!" she said, "Minna is to be married on the thirteenth!" Her eyes rested steadily on me, while she spoke. At the last word, she sank back, and relapsed into the condition in which you have just seen her.'

'Can you do nothing for her?'

'Nothing. Our modern science is absolutely ignorant of the poisons which Professor Fontaine's fatal ingenuity revived. Slow poisoning by reiterated doses, in small

quantities, we understand. But slow poisoning by one dose is so entirely beyond our experience, that medical men in general refuse to believe in it.'

'Are you sure that she is poisoned?' I asked.

'After what Jack told me this morning when he woke, I have no doubt she is poisoned by "Alexander's Wine." She appears to have treacherously offered it to him as a remedy—and to have hesitated, at the last moment, to let him have it. As a remedy, Jack's ignorant faith gave it to her by the hands of Schwartz. When we have more time before us, you shall hear the details. In the meanwhile, I can only tell you that the retribution is complete. Madame Fontaine might even now be saved, if Jack

had not given all that remained of the antidote to Mrs. Wagner.'

'Is there any objection to my asking Jack for the particulars?'

'The strongest possible objection. It is of the utmost importance to discourage him from touching on the subject, in the future. He has already told Mrs. Wagner that he has saved her life; and, just before you came in, I found him comforting Minna. "Your mamma has taken her own good medicine, Missy; she will soon get well." I have been obliged—God forgive me!—to tell your aunt and Minna that he is misled by insane delusions, and that they are not to believe one word of what he has said to them.'

'No doubt your motive justifies you,' I

said—not penetrating his motive at the moment.

'You will understand me directly,' he answered. 'I trust to your honour under any circumstances. Why have I taken you into my confidence, under *these* circumstances? For a very serious reason, Mr. David. You are likely to be closely associated, in the time to come, with your aunt and Minna—and I look to you to help the good work which I have begun. Mrs. Wagner's future life must not be darkened by a horrible recollection. That sweet girl must enjoy the happy years that are in store for her, unembittered by the knowledge of her mother's guilt. Do you understand, now, why I am compelled to speak unjustly of poor Jack?'

As a proof that I understood him, I pro-

mised the secresy which he had every right to expect from me.

The entrance of the nurse closed our conference. She reported Madame Fontaine's malady to be already altering for the worse.

The doctor watched the case. At intervals, I too saw her again.

Although it happened long ago, I cannot prevail upon myself to dwell on the deliberate progress of the hellish Borgia poison, in undermining the forces of life. The nervous shudderings reached their climax, and then declined as gradually as they had arisen. For hours afterwards, she lay in a state of complete prostration. Not a last word, not a last look, rewarded the devoted girl, watching faithfully at the bedside. No

more of it—no more! Late in the afternoon of the next day, Doctor Dormann, gently, most gently, removed Minna from the room. Mr. Keller and I looked at each other in silence. We knew that Madame Fontaine was dead.

VIII.

I had not forgotten the clasped book that she had tried vainly to open, in Doctor Dormann's presence. Taking it myself from under the pillow, I left Mr. Keller and the doctor to say if I should give it, unopened, to Minna.

'Certainly not!' said the doctor.

'Why not?'

'Because it will tell her what she must never know. I believe that book to be a Diary. Open it, and see.'

I found the spring and opened the clasps. It *was* a Diary.

'You judged, I suppose, from the appearance of the book?' I said.

'Not at all. I judged from my own experience, at the time when I was Medical Officer at the prison here. An educated criminal is almost invariably an inveterate egotist. We are all interesting to ourselves —but the more vile we are, the more intensely we are absorbed in ourselves. The very people who have, logically speaking, the most indisputable interest in concealing their crimes, are also the very people who, almost without exception, yield to the temptation of looking at themselves in the pages of a Diary.'

'I don't doubt your experience, doctor. But your results puzzle me.'

'Think a little, Mr. David, and you will

not find the riddle so very hard to read. The better we are, the more unselfishly we are interested in others. The worse we are, the more inveterately our interest is concentrated on ourselves. Look at your aunt as an example of what I say. This morning there were some letters waiting for her, on the subject of those reforms in the treatment of mad people, which she is as resolute as ever to promote—in this country as well as in England. It was with the greatest difficulty that I prevailed on her not to answer those letters just yet: in other words, not to excite her brain and nervous system, after such an ordeal as she has just passed through. Do you think a wicked woman—with letters relating merely to the interests of other people waiting for her—would have stood

in any need of my interference? Not she! The wicked woman would have thought only of herself, and would have been far too much interested in her own recovery to run the risk of a relapse. Open that book of Madame Fontaine's at any of the later entries. You will find the miserable woman self-betrayed in every page.'

It was true! Every record of Madame Fontaine's most secret moments, presented in this narrative, was first found in her Diary.

As an example:—Her Diary records, in the fullest detail, the infernal ingenuity of the stratagem by which she usurped her title to Mr. Keller's confidence, as the preserver of his life. 'I have only to give him the Alexander's Wine,' she writes, 'to make

sure, by means of the antidote, of curing the illness which I have myself produced. After that, Minna's mother becomes Mr. Keller's guardian angel, and Minna's marriage is a certainty.'

On a later page, she is similarly self described—in Mrs. Wagner's case—as acting from an exactly opposite motive, in choosing the Looking-Glass Drops. 'They not only kill soonest, and most surely defy detection,' she proceeds, 'but I have it on the authority of the label, that my husband has tried t find the antidote to these Drops, and has tried in vain. If my heart fails me, when the deed is done, there can be no reprieve for the woman whose tongue I must silence for ever—or, after all I have sacrificed, my child's future is ruined.'

There is little doubt that she intended to destroy these compromising pages, on her return to Mr. Keller's house—and that she would have carried out her intention, but for those first symptoms of the poison, which showed themselves in the wandering of her mind, and the helpless trembling of her hands.

The final entry in the Diary has an interest of its own, which I think justifies the presentation of it in this place. It shows the purifying influence of the maternal instinct in a wicked nature, surviving to the last Even Madame Fontaine's nature preserved, in this way, a softer side. On the memorable occasion of her meeting with Mr. Keller in the hall, she had acted as imprudently as if she had been the most foolish woman

living, in her eagerness to plead Minna's cause with the man on whom Minna's marriage depended. She had shrunk from poisoning harmless Jack, even for her own protection. She would not even seduce Minna into telling a lie, when a lie would have served them both at the most critical moment of their lives.

Are such redeeming features unnatural in an otherwise wicked woman? Think of your own 'inconsistencies.' Read these last words of a sinner—and thank God that you were not tempted as she was:

'. . . Sent Minna out of my room, and hurt my sensitive girl cruelly. I am afraid of her! This last crime seems to separate me from that pure creature—all the more, because it has been committed in her dearest

interests, and for her sweet sake. Every time she looks at me, I am afraid she may see what I have done for her, in my face. Oh, how I long to take her in my arms, and devour her with kisses! I daren't do it —I daren't do it.'

Lord, have mercy on her—miserable sinner!

IX.

The night is getting on; and the lamp I am writing by grows dim.

My mind wanders away from Frankfort, and from all that once happened there. The picture now in my memory presents an English scene.

I am at the house of business in London. Two friends are waiting for me. One of them is Fritz. The other is the most popular person in the neighbourhood; a happy, harmless creature, known to everyone by the undignified nickname of Jack Straw. Thanks to my aunt's influence, and to the change of

scene, no return of the relapse at Frankfort has shown itself. We are easy about the future of our little friend.

As to the past, we have made no romantic discoveries, relating to the earlier years of Jack's life. Who were his parents; whether they died or whether they deserted him; how he lived, and what he suffered, before he drifted into the service of the chemistry-professor at Würzburg—these, and other questions like them, remain unanswered. Jack himself feels no sort of interest in our inquiries. He either will not or cannot rouse his feeble memory to help us. 'What does it matter now?' he says. 'I began to live when Mistress first came to see me. I don't remember, and won't remember, anything before that.'

So the memoirs of Jack remain unwritten, for want of materials—like the memoirs of many another foundling, in real life.

While I am speaking of Jack, I am keeping my two friends waiting in the reception-room. I dress myself in my best clothes and join them. Fritz is silent and nervous; unreasonably impatient for the arrival of the carriage at the door. Jack promenades the room, with a superb nosegay in the button-hole of a glorious blue coat. He has a watch; he carries a cane; he wears white gloves, and tight nankeen pantaloons. He struts out before us, when the carriage comes at last. 'I don't deny that Fritz is a figure in the festival,' he says, when we drive away; 'but

I positively assert that the thing is not complete without Me. If my dress fails in any respect to do me justice, for Heaven's sake mention it, one of you, before we pass the tailor's door!' I answer Jack, by telling him that he is in all respects perfect. And Jack answers me, 'David, you have your faults; but your taste is invariably correct. Give me a little more room; I can't face Mistress with crumpled coat-tails.'

We reach a little village in the neighbourhood of London, and stop at the gate of the old church.

We walk up to the altar-rails, and wait there. All the women in the place are waiting also. They merely glance at Fritz and at me—their whole attention is concentrated on Jack. They take him for the

bridegroom. Jack discovers it; and is better pleased with himself than ever.

The organist plays a wedding-march. The bride, simply and unpretendingly dressed, just fluttered enough to make her eyes irresistible, and her complexion lovely, enters the church, leaning on Mr. Keller's arm.

Our good partner looks younger than usual. At his own earnest request, the business in Frankfort has been sold; the head-partner first stipulating for the employment of a given number of reputable young women in the office. Removed from asso ciations which are inexpressibly repellent to him, Mr. Keller is building a house, near Mrs. Wagner's pretty cottage, on the hill above the village. Here he proposes to

pass the rest of his days peacefully, with his two married children.

On their way to the altar, Mr. Keller and Minna are followed by Doctor Dormann (taking his annual holiday, this year, in England). The doctor gives his arm to the woman of all women whom Jack worships and loves. My kind and dear aunt—with the old bright charm in her face; the firm friend of all friendless creatures—why does my calmness desert me, when I try to draw my little portrait of her; Minna's second mother, standing by Minna's side, on the greatest day of her life?

I can't even see the paper. Nearly fifty years have passed, since that wedding-day. Oh, my coevals, who have outlived your dearest friends, like me, *you* know what is

the matter with my eyes! I must take out my handkerchief, and put down my pen—and leave some of you younger ones to finish the story of the marriage for yourselves.

THE END.

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